

**VERO BEACH RECREATION COMMISSION MINUTES**  
**Tuesday, January 8, 2019 – 4:00 p.m.**  
**City Hall, Council Chambers, Vero Beach, Florida**

**PRESENT:** Chairman, Richard Yemm; Vice Chairman, Sue Dinunno; Members: Judy Jones (arrived at 4:07 p.m.), Bobbi Burdick, Brooke Malone, and Alternate Member, Greg Holtan **Also Present** Recreation Director, Rob Slezak; Assistant Recreation Director, Patty Howard (arrived at 4:07 p.m.); Assistant City Attorney, Stefanie Beskovoyne; and Senior Administrative Assistant, Rita Hawkins

**Excused Absence:** Gerett MacMillan

**1. CALL TO ORDER**

Chairman Yemm called today's meeting to order at 4:00 p.m. and the Senior Administrative Assistant performed the roll call.

**2. APPROVAL OF MINUTES**

**A) November 13, 2018**

**The minutes of the November 13, 2018 Recreation Commission meeting were unanimously approved.**

**3. PUBLIC COMMENT**

None

**4. NEW BUSINESS**

**A) Review of Annual Report**

Mr. Yemm said that the Recreation Commission members each received a copy of the annual report (on file in the City Clerk's Office). He asked if there were any additions, corrections, deletions, etc.

**Mrs. Dinunno made a motion to accept the annual report as it is written and pass it onto the City Council. Mrs. Burdick seconded the motion and it passed unanimously.**

**5. OLD BUSINESS**

Mr. Yemm stated that a public workShop will follow this meeting tonight at 6:00 p.m. He said the way they should conduct the workshop is to let the public speak and then the Commission members can put their comments into the record. He explained that he asked Ms. Alma Lee Loy to speak first, since she was one of the original members of the Recreation Commission and helped establish the Parks and Recreation programs in Vero Beach. The second person he would like to speak is Mr. Rob Slezak, Recreation Director. He will bring everything up to date and provide a general overview of the purpose of the meeting. They will hear the comments from the

public following Mr. Slezak. He will be trying to keep the discussion on track, which is about Parks and Recreation and not the Marina and Lagoon issues.

Mrs. Burdick asked if there is any way to limit the time that people speak. Mr. Yemm said yes. If anyone speaks more than three (3) to five (5) minutes then he can ask them to take into consideration that other people are wishing to be heard.

Mrs. Dinunno said if they are strictly discussing Parks and Recreation, she assumes they will not address the letter they received about the Marina (on file in the City Clerk's office). Mr. Yemm replied that Mr. Tony Young, City Councilmember, will be at the meeting to address the letter and he will ask him to read it into the record. He said this is not a position that the Recreation Commission wants to get involved with.

Mr. Yemm stated that he would like to know if the people speaking are City or County residents. They might have a lot of County residents, but it is the City residents that control the vote for the development of the City of Vero Beach.

Ms. Stefanie Beskovoyne, Assistant City Attorney, said it is not just City residents that use the Parks. She understands that the City residents are the ones who vote the electors, but many County residents use the facilities and pay the appropriate fees. She would advise that they keep it open to the public. Mr. Yemm replied that it will be open to everyone, but he just wants to know if they live in the City or County. He said they know that most of the facilities and Parks are predominately used by County residents.

Mr. Slezak explained that for activities, 60 to 80 percent of the participants are non-residents, and when they look at tourism the percentage is even higher. Mrs. Burdick stated that people pay a tourist tax if they stay at hotels. Mr. Slezak explained that the tourist tax goes to the County.

Mr. Yemm said if they are going to discuss taking some of the City Parks out of the Charter then is it the City residents that will control it, not people living outside the City.

Mr. Brian Heady, City resident, said he believes that all residents from the City and County should speak and they should listen to them. There are probably plenty of County residents who have good ideas, but there are some County residents who continually want to sell the City's public Park lands to benefit others. He said one (1) thing that draws people to this town is the green space and Parks. He has watched Mr. Slezak for many years work miracles, because over the years the City Councils' have refused to put enough money into the Parks to keep them in tiptop shape. The Parks are not as well kept as they were 25 years ago. He said go to Young Park and look at the roofs on the pavilions. Also look at the Park restroom facilities at Humiston Park. They are in terrible shape, because the City employees hands are tied. The City has a pile of money at the moment from the sale of the electric utility, so the Recreation Commission has a window of opportunity to help the City residents and recommend to the City Council that they use some of that money and pay off all the loans on the Parks, Dodgertown, Marina, etc.

Mr. Yemm said he has been on the Recreation Commission for over 20 years and he has observed all kinds of participation. He believes there is value in everyone, but the issue is now do they get that value out of the people.

Mr. Heady said he agrees that it is sometimes very difficult to get something out of people, because they are not always very good at explaining their ideas. He hopes that a good group of people come to the 6:00 p.m. workshop that care about the green space, the Parks, and the public lands.

Mr. Yemm asked Mr. Slezak if he knew how many acres make up the City. Mr. Slezak said he did not know off hand, but he would estimate several thousands of acres.

Ms. Beskovoyne stated that the City is 13.34 square miles. Mrs. Malone stated that equates to just a little over 8,500 acres.

Mr. Yemm asked how much money is spent on recreation per capita. Mr. Slezak stated that there are 15,800 City residents, but he did not have the dollar amount.

Mr. Yemm asked how many acres of City land are allocated for recreational purposes and Parks.

Mr. Slezak stated that based on an old report there were 206.15 acres in Parks with facilities and 212.94 acres of open green space. Mr. Yemm commented that if there are over 200 acres of open green space that equates to a little over 2.5% of the City Park lands. The City of Vero Beach is significantly on the low end of Park space compared to other cities. He said he viewed a land trust report on line that listed the percentages of many cities. Mrs. Malone said she would like to see those stats. Mrs. Patty Howard, Assistant Recreation Director, said that information might be from the National Recreation and Parks Association (NARP). Mr. Slezak explained that the Florida Statewide Comprehensive Outdoor Recreation Plan is called the SCORP. It is a little different then what Mr. Yemm is talking about. It presents a general idea of what each city should have based on a population of fewer than 15,000 people and it is just based on Florida cities. For example, it shows that a city should have one (1) baseball field per every 5,000 people, one (1) basketball court per every 2,000 people, and it goes into how many boat ramps, small and large playground areas, etc. The SCORP will help the Commission understand what the City should have. He passed it around for the Commission members to review.

Mr. Yemm asked when was the last master plan done by consultants. Mr. Slezak replied that the last master plan created by a group of consultants was done in 1992. It focused on recreation events and programming, but the City was still with the County at that time and it did not cover the Parks. He continued by reading some of the statistics for the City when they were with the County.

Mrs. Malone asked what is parcours that is listed on the SCORP report. Mr. Slezak explained that parcours is a group of activities or exercise stations similar to what is in Riverside Park along the walking trails.

Mr. Heady reported that Alaska has over a million acres of Park land, Jacksonville has half a million acres, and Miami has 25,000 acres of Park land. The question is not how they compare with other cities, but how do they perform for what the community wants. He does not want the City to buy any more Park land, but he does not want to lose any of the land that is used for Parks and green space either.

Mr. Yemm said what he is looking at is not the number of Parks they have, but the percentage of land in the City that is used for Parks. An issue he sees is differentiating between the required neighborhood Parks and Parks like Riverside Park, Humiston Park, etc. He asked Mr. Slezak if the Dog Park is still considered green space. He said he does not consider it to be open green space now, because it is limited primarily to dog usage. People are not using it as a general use Park. Mrs. Malone said the Dog Park is probably one of the prettiest green spaces at this point and it is a wonderful example of a public/private partnership. They have made so many improvements including installing mature trees and the City has graciously allowed access to the river.

Mrs. Malone said the question she has for Mr. Heady is if he is asking the Recreation Commission to make a formal demand that finances from the sale of the electric utility go immediately into a plan that will fortify or garner support and partnerships from organizations in the community. The people in this community don't attend the Recreation Commission meetings and they don't seem to care about their play space, so it is hard to get the City Council to support it. If Mr. Heady's suggestion is to put up a fight for a portion of these proceeds he needs to gather his constituents and followers to make enough noise. The people they do hear from are small groups and organizations that can't seem to catch the attention of the City Council. She does not know what the secret is, so she welcomes any input Mr. Heady might have on how to demand a portion of the proceeds to get the green spaces taken care of. Mr. Heady replied that he has been advocating for more money for the City Parks and City employees for over 30 years. He would guess that there will be more people at the evening workshop who will be in support of the Parks.

Mrs. Dinunno said a problem with the City is our system of government. Every year there is someone new on the City Council that shifts the balance of power. What they thought was a plan by putting something in the budget to make improvements suddenly is not going to be funded. It is very frustrating, especially for those who have been fighting the good fight. If they do not have the City Council behind them then they have nothing. There is no point in spending a bunch of money developing a master plan if the City Council will not fund it, or continue to fund it.

Mr. Heady said he agrees that doing a master plan is difficult. He believes they need to pay off the Marina debt and do the work that is necessary to fix it, because it is a moneymaker for the City. They need to stop getting rid of the income producers that the City has.

Mrs. Malone said if the City Council gave the Recreation Department some money Mr. Slezak would have a couple of options. He could do a universal bandage all over, or they could spend a big chunk on one (1) or maybe two (2) areas, make a really big impact, and get the attention of the public.

Mr. Slezak said he sees this master plan being done in two (2) pieces. One (1) is a master plan that the City Council is looking at from the Recreation Department. It will be more about what they do now with their facilities, programs, and Parks and how they utilize and run them currently. The second piece will be doing a master plan on what they will do with all of the City properties for the future.

Mr. Heady said his interests are looking at the immediate projects. There is enough money to pay off the debt on all of the City Parks and to replace the roofs on the pavilions at Young Park without having to create a master plan.

Mr. Slezak explained that there is also a plan for naming rights and it is being explored and studied by the Finance Director and the Planning Director. They want to see if they can create an interest in a group or someone to sponsor the picnic pavilions, gazebos, buildings, roofs, etc.

Mr. Heady said that could be done in concert with doing the work first and then advertise for sponsors to put their name on it and to help protect their investments.

## **6. RECREATION DIRECTOR'S MATTERS**

### **A) Recap of the Christmas Drama**

Mrs. Howard reported that the Christmas Drama was great and she thinks they had record crowds.

### **B) Gymnastics Registration – January 19, 2019**

Mrs. Howard stated that the next registration for the Gymnastics session will be on January 19, 2019 at 8:00 a.m. They expect a large registration, because this group will perform at the Firefighters Fair.

### **C) Mother Daughter Tea Party – January 26, 2019**

The Mother Daughter Tea Party will be on January 26, 2019 and she believes they are almost full.

Mr. Slezak reported that starting in January they increased the fees for several of the programs and they started charging for the use of the picnic pavilions. Mr. Yemm asked if they are getting any feedback. Mr. Slezak replied yes. They will have to give it some time to see how people react and they will need to see what the numbers reflect when they get to the bottom line.

Mr. Slezak said they do not want to lose sight of what brings people to this community. There are a number of variables that can affect what they offer and at what cost. People look for and participate in recreation and a lot of them cannot afford recreation elsewhere and are on a set income. They also assist as many families as possible who cannot afford to send their children to camp. He said there is a nice balance in the City with a great variety of amenities. For example, if people come out to play pickle ball or go visit the beach, what do you think these people are going to do afterwards. They will probably go out to a restaurant, visit the local stores, shop, etc. There is an economic impact by people utilizing the Parks and facilities even if they are County residents or tourist.

Mr. Yemm said there has been a continual fight to get sales tax money to help with the funding of the City facilities. The percentage of non-City residents is increasing along with the deterioration of the infrastructure of the facilities. This keeps putting the City further behind on the need to fund maintenance work.

## **7. CHAIRMAN'S MATTERS**

Mr. Yemm said the workshop this evening will be a broad discussion and a very active meeting.

## **8. MEMBER'S MATTERS**

Mrs. Malone stated that she did two (2) walkthroughs with two (2) individuals at Leisure Square last month. One (1) individual was interested in potentially funding a project there and the other individual was interested in approaching someone about funding a project. During the walkthrough she got the feedback that she was nervous about getting. She brought two (2) people who she thought were very interested. However, both parties realized they could not take on the project themselves, because Leisure Square is in such shabby shape. She said she is exhausted with trying to find someone to take an interest in that facility and her empathy is starting to kick in. She said that there has to be a way to get the attention from someone and get that facility up to par.

Mrs. Burdick said that they have the same problem at the Community Center and she has spoken to Mr. Slezak about it several times. It is always rented, but yet no money is coming in to fix it up. The blinds on the windows are broken, the floors are in terrible shape, etc. Mr. Slezak explained that there has been some money allocated for work to be done at the Community Center. They awnings have been put up and the bathrooms are being worked on. The funding is not there to do all the work at once though. There are several different departments that are fighting for the one-cent sales tax, which includes the Police Department, and the Public Works Department for road and sidewalk repairs. It would be nice to find an angel who could help them with their other facilities as they did with the playgrounds, and Michael Field.

Mr. Slezak explained that the Planning Department along with the City Council is putting together a request for proposal for the three (3) corner properties. He believes people will discuss those properties tonight and Mr. Jason Jeffries, Planning Director, will be at the meeting to talk about it. Mr. Yemm said that nothing can be done with the properties that are protected under the City Charter unless they are pulled out of the Charter with a referendum and a vote by the public. They will probably be approached about the commercialization of those properties.

Ms. Beskovoyne said properties that were deeded to the City by the State also have other deed restrictions and limitations on the use of the property.

Ms. Jones asked for an update on the skatepark. Mr. Slezak replied that there is enthusiasm for it and they are hoping someone will come forward to help with the funding.

Mr. Slezak said they need to remember that the Community Center, Leisure Square, and the Center Stage buildings might not look the best, but they are highly used. He is hoping they can find a partnership to come in and share the work with the City.

Mrs. Dinunno said she is encouraged that Mrs. Malone is bringing people around to the facilities. She said she has been working on funding children participation. She thinks other than the redevelopment of Humiston Park all of the other City improvements have been made by small organizations or groups. How many more groups are out there for them to reach out to. The

City has not looked from the top down and they have been letting the Parks and buildings deteriorate for years. It is very disturbing and she wants tonight's meeting to be productive.

## **9. NEXT MEETING DATE**

### **A) Next Recreation Commission Meeting Date – February 12, 2019**

The next regular Recreation Commission meeting is scheduled for February 12, 2019.

## **10. ADJOURNMENT**

Today's meeting adjourned at 5:28 p.m.

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