



Tulare County Parks Advisory Committee

**Committee
Members**
Mike Chrisman
Carol Finney
Nancy Hawkins
Neil Pilegard
Courtney Roche, Jr.

MINUTES

May 11, 2017

4:00 P.M. Committee Convenes

NOTICE TO THE PUBLIC PUBLIC COMMENT PERIOD

At this time, members of the public may comment on any item not appearing on the agenda. Under state law, matters presented under this item cannot be discussed or acted upon by the Board at this time. For items appearing on the agenda, the public is invited to make comments at the time the item comes up for Board consideration. Any person addressing the Board will be limited to a maximum of three (3) minutes so that all interested parties have an opportunity to speak. At all times, please use the microphone and state your name and address for the record.

Present Members: Mike Chrisman, Carol Finney, Nancy Hawkins, Neil Pilegard, Courtney Roche, Jr.

Absent Members: None

Staff Present: Supervisor Amy Shuklian John Hess, Brooke Sisk, Katrina Fernandez

- 1. Call to Order & Welcome:** The meeting was called to order at 4:01 p.m. by Vice Chairman Hawkins. Vice Chairman Hawkins welcomed everyone in attendance.
- 2. Approval of Minutes:** Committee Member Carol Finney made a motion to accept the minutes from the previous meeting as submitted and Committee member Courtney Roche, Jr. seconded the motion. The motion was carried unanimously.
- 3. Public Comment:** Vice Chairman Hawkins speaking as part of the public, shows public support for Neil Pilegard's efforts as Parks & Recreation Division Manager and states she has had numerous experiences working on Park Advisory Boards. Vice Chairman states she was on Visalia East Side Park Advisory Board and attended all meetings. She also went to all of Mooney Grove Plans meetings. She is incoming chair at Water Way Trails Committee in the City of Visalia and has been a part of that

committee for four years. She is also outgoing President for Kings/Tulare County Master Gardeners. Vice Chairman explains Kings County Master Gardeners deal with all homeowner problems and questions about plants. She states she likes the idea of food trucks coming in and the idea of the natural waterways. She comments that she believes the focus of the public should be on the plans that have already been approved like Mooney Grove Park Plan and East Side Park Plan and encourages work within those plans as opposed to pursuing other ideas that the public states they have for the parks. Vice Chairman Hawkins states that when the PAC speaks with the public, members need to be positive and lead the conversation toward the plans that have been approved and what is going to be worked on. Vice Chairman Hawkins also stresses maintenance in the parks. She cites public comment regarding Mooney Grove not looking the way it did thirty, forty, or fifty years ago. Vice Chairman Hawkins mentions that the electrical system, the irrigation, and the piping system need to be redone. She states that it took three years to get a new well in and that people are asking why the trees are dying and she believes it is because the trees had died three years prior to the well being replaced. She talks about there being multiple grants offered, but that it is only for new waterways and trails and not the maintenance of them. Vice Chairman Hawkins advises the committee that before they start building any new things, they need to work on fixing the existing things. "Look at the plans that have been approved by the supervisors and the city council and move on from there." End of comment. Vice Chairman Hawkins asks about the absence of Museum Curator Amy King.

John Hess let her know King had a previous engagement.

Vice Chairman Hawkins goes on to talk about the Tulare County Museum and says it's fantastic. She thinks it's a plus for Tulare County to have a museum and says we need to look at what we have and focus on it and not talk about how things were in the past and wanting to go back to that.

Committee member Finney adds on saying that one of the things that does not get mentioned a lot is the ethnic days and a variety of groups that the County has going on is great. She also comments on the building they're in and how spacious it is.

Chairman Chrisman joins the meeting.

John Hess updates Chairman Chrisman on the topics Vice Chairman Hawkins talked about stating they were insightful and thorough comments following up Monday night's forum. Hess brings up a copy of the article published by the Visalia Times Delta as a result of that forum as an information item. Hess thanked everyone who was present for that forum. He notes that Council Member Greg Collins from the City of Visalia proposed that the City of Visalia consider doing some type of joint management of Mooney Grove Park sometime in the future. Hess feels that comment caught the most public attention at that meeting. One other thing that was discussed at the forum was maintenance and operations and how employees keep the parks running. There was also discussion regarding the 20-Year Master Plan. Hess concluded by saying the Monday

night forum was a positive opportunity to speak with and get feedback from the community.

Chairman Chrisman added that he felt it was an excellent conversation and that they should have more of them.

Council Member Finney talks about Council Member Greg Collins from the City of Visalia and his proposal to join management on Mooney Grove Park.

Hess says they would have to look at the technicalities and the deed restrictions on Mooney Grove Park when they were granted the property from the Mooney family.

Hawkins adds in that she handles all the money aspect and it's going to take a lot to upgrade the park.

Supervisor Shuklian mentions that she noticed new growth in the park and that it's great to see.

Committee Member Pilegard agrees and says that there is still more work to be done.

Chairman Chrisman asks the committee what they believe is the next step after the forum.

Hess says there is a lot of feedback, but the solutions are most valuable along with who is willing to help provide them. He states that once the Park Strategic Plan is approved by the Board, the PAC will go out to four or five communities and hold a similar forum. He says the process is similar to public engagement process.

Chairman Chrisman asks about the time frame for Board approval and outreach.

Hess says the matter will go before the Board in June.

Chairman Chrisman asks if there are any other questions or comments.

Committee Member Pilegard offers examples of areas where collaboration with other public agencies has been successful. He cites the basin, moving the parks with Tulare Irrigation District, and the two disc golf courses. The basin has been running since January. It has been a very positive thing and a great benefit for the park. He shares a comment from Louise Jackson from the Museum Board. She said she knows the Parks have gotten slack over cleaning up the islands, but she thinks it looks wonderful.

Kevin Caskey, who has served on the board of the Tulare County Museum, adds in saying he appreciates the comment about the museum and facilities. They don't have as much support from the public as they would like and that is why he is at the PAC meeting supporting Tulare County Parks.

Chairman Chrisman asks if there are any other comments, no one adds in so Chrisman moves onto the fourth agenda item.

4. Visalia Feral Cat Coalition Trap, Neuter, and Return Pilot Project:

Chairman Chrisman gives the floor to Hess who is doing this presentation.

Hess recommends extending the Visalia Feral Cat Coalition (VFCC) pilot program another year. Having the opportunity to work with the coalition on a variety of different things, staff has designed some objectives and measurable outcomes to better track the effectiveness of the program. Recommendations include: research and establish humane cat deterrent methods which might be helpful for the museum grounds and preserving sensitive artifacts, research and establish parks and recreation wildlife management policy. Hess characterizes the extended pilot program as an opportunity to identify and work on areas where there are gaps and areas with room for improvements.

Chairman Chrisman asks if there were any objectives and measurable outcomes outlined at the beginning of the year with the pilot project and if those objectives were met by the VFCC.

Hess confirms that there were objectives set for the project but they were not conclusive met and that is the reason staff is working towards extending the pilot another year with the coalition to better research and establish outcomes for the programs.

Hawkins adds in that it is a good example of working with an outside entity to solve a problem. She states that when the program was started, the cats were out of control and working with them has been successful.

Chairman Chrisman greets two other parties to the meeting. Chairman Chrisman asks for further discussion of Hess's request to extend the pilot program - what worked and didn't work.

VFCC President Karen Kent says she had a conversation with Hess the day prior and was surprised at the recommendation. It was her understanding that the pilot was taking the concept and testing it. She states that the VFCC met with the County at least for an hour usually once a month. Her interpretation was that the County never had real issues. She asks if there is something the VFCC can do better. She feels like the pilot program has gone better than anticipated and that the ultimate goal is to control the feral cat population. She wants to know why staff is requesting an extension of the pilot rather than a contract. Said she feels that implies there is a risk involved in which has not been properly addressed or identified.

Chairman Chrisman asks Hess to answer the question of why staff is not recommending moving into a contract.

Hess states he is appreciative of the comments and adds that the objective of the pilot program was to determine the effectiveness of TNR proposal. He doesn't have sufficient data to say conclusively that the program does work and cannot recommend moving into a contract as opposed to an extension. He states that extending the pilot will allow time

to refine the data collection process and look to what is working, and feels that it is a program that warrants another year of looking at but not permanently at this point.

Kent Respects Hess' opinion and wants to know how they got to the pilot program. She believes it came about because what was being done before wasn't working.

Chairman Chrisman asks staff what isn't working.

Staff Member Brooke Sisk, Supervising Analyst for General Services, responds. She first thanks the volunteers and people she has worked with along the process. She says she is not suggesting that progress has not been made nor negatively speak of the efforts made, however staff require more data to conclusively suggest the program is effective in stabilizing/reducing the population. She notes some obstacles that have been faced along the way, including a flea infestation at the museum, and states that staff have some information in support of continuing the program and some information to the contrary. She wants to deter cats from the park in other humane ways, if possible and believes the greatest success in the program is that they have been collaborating and working together as a team.

Chairman Chrisman asks if the increase flea population is contributable solely to the cats.

Sisk responds that they have a statement from the County-contracted pest control vendor that believes the increase flea population is a result to the cats and recommends the removal of the cats.

Chairman Chrisman asks if the VFCC is in favor of that recommendation.

Kent respond no. She says that any population of cats or animals will bring fleas and believes that blaming the flea population solely to the cats is not correct. She states that the VFCC treats cats throughout the year to prevent the fleas.

Hess adds in that the greatest level of magnitude of concern is the museum grounds. He says that the museum is one of the reasons they are pushing for another year with the pilot program because the museum is one of the highest expenses to maintain. He states that it has been a central area where issues have come up. How can we continue to manage the museum territory in a way that there can be a balance between the two interests?

Kent asks Hess if he is aware of the current management plan and what the original map out of the restrictions were. She states that it is thirty feet and theoretically the cats are in the restricted area. She says the feeders often lure the cats to where it is not a restricted area to be able to treat them.

VFCC Member Diane Dunbar says there are two cats in the museum. There were twenty in May of 2013.

Chairman Chrisman asks the committee what other issues they have.

Hess and Sisk say they are meeting with the VFCC soon to speak in more detail of the issues and working together to resolve them.

Sisk says the VFCC typically work with staff as issues arise and address them. She adds that there are some things that do not have a permanent resolution.

Kent says that if the extension to the pilot program gets approved, they will still be supportive. She recommends that the committee make the measurable objective truly something that can be measured. She concedes two requests that were not met by the VFCC were revised versions of handouts to instruct people to not feed the cats and the submission of a detailed data sheet. She states that wasn't acceptable. Kent states that she loves that she has the opportunity to sit down with County staff and talk about things next week.

Chairman Chrisman asks what the PAC can do to help make it more productive or are they on the right track to get things more productive at this point in time from her perspective.

Another VFCC member comments that they want the committee to let them know what their measurable data goals are and that they let them know ahead of time so that they are able to monitor and collect that data over the course of the year.

Chairman Chrisman asks the VFCC and staff to go down the list of things after the meetings next week and make clear all of the quantifiable objectives and how they are going to measure success. He believes things are looking good at this point.

Kent says that the only thing that is not on the data sheet kept by VFCC is the caregiver's name who first sighted the cat. She notes the VFCC is still working with the neighboring mobile home manor. They've extended the TNR Program to them.

Chairman Chrisman thanks everyone for their commitment/effort to the program and working together to make things work.

Kent adds in that she appreciates their work and cooperation to the park.

Chairman Chrisman asks if there are any other questions or comments.

Kevin Caskey, Chairman of the Museum Board, states that the Board discusses the cat and flea problems continuously. He cites comments from people who come to the museum that there are fleas. It is a concern of the Museum Board. Caskey suggests relocating the cats.

Chairman Chrisman says that relocation is included in the TNR Program. Asked if there are any other questions or comments. No response, moved on to next agenda item.

5. Park Well Status Report:

Neil says Mooney Grove well is completed and that he got an agreement through Purchasing. It is both domestic and irrigated. Cutler's well has been drilled and appears to have good production. He says the project is a little behind on completion dates, but they are getting it done. The Ledbetter well went through, but the pump was destroyed with sand and when it was pulled out, it blew the well. The well was originally drilled to 183 feet. The casing stops at 104 feet and it is an open bottom well. Went to air develop and they got to 98 feet and hit sand. They opened it up to about 155 feet and have a cavity there. A pump is being worked in at the moment.

6. Tree Mortality:

Neil encourages the Committee to read the tree mortality packet provided by the Sierra Nevada Conservancy. He says the publication explains why tree mortality is where it is at and has references that explain why. The report came through the State agency.

7: Parks Strategic Business Plan Presentation:

Hess provides committee with a Board agenda item, a PowerPoint presentation, and a copy of the plan. He says that the County Administrative Officer, earlier this year, in conjunction with the Parks Advisory Committee and Board of Supervisors directed staff to prepare a document outlining methods to improve the management and conditions of the parks. A team was put together that represented budget and finance, development, parks, analysts, administration and a variety of different County staff. They met several times and brainstormed the best methods for advancing the parks right now given that there is a lot of public attention and opportunity.

Hess goes on to say the goal today is to seek comments from this meeting, take the presentation to the Board of Supervisors and, if approved at the Board, present the plan to the affected communities. Hess states that the plan surveys and analyzes several important data points relevant to the overall conditions of the parks and uses this analysis to outline a strategy for improvement. Their goal is to yield greater success with limited resources. They hope this document will help influence decision making and see the plan as proactive and working together in thinking of ways that isn't going to over burden the system. Hess tells the committee that the plan has four recommendations based on the analysis conducted. The first is to establish a maintenance and improvement program to ensure that the parks are being maintained and improved at necessary levels. The second recommendation is to annually evaluate the availability of a dedicated source of one-time project funding. The third recommendation is to increase public engagement and outreach through targeted community meetings. And the fourth is improving customer service. Focus on those four distinct business areas are recommended to improve the condition, maintenance, and the ongoing operation of Tulare County Parks in a hopefully meaningful way.

Chairman Chrisman says that he thinks with all those areas, they can have definite quantifiable objectives and monitor them along the way.

Hess agrees and directs the committee's attention to the PowerPoint packet they received.

Hawkins asked if the recommendations are in priority order.

Hess responds saying that they are in order of priority recommendation. He starts the power point presentation by giving background. There are 10 County Parks, 628 total acres, and a roughly \$2million budget in a fiscal year. The Parks Division has 27 fulltime employees under Manager Neil Pilegard and, since 2010, has been managed by the County Administrative Office. The Board put together the Parks Advisory Committee in 2015 within a few months of approving the Mooney Grove 20 Year Conceptual Master Plan.

Hess talks about the existing operational impact and explains that it means that there are things outside the control of parks management, such as environmental conditions, which constrain the park staff's ability to maintain and advance the parks. Severe drought conditions have significantly decreased the available ground water each park has for irrigation purposes, which led to premature tree loss. Premature tree loss led to exacerbated tree mortality. Hess adds that the global financial recession has also significantly impacted the available financial resources to the Parks Division. He states that the past three fiscal years have been the only years the Parks budget has increased above the recession level. The last item Hess mentions is deferred maintenance. He states that because of these and other factors, many maintenance items have become back logged and must be addressed in the coming years or he believes they will continue to see further deterioration of the parks condition.

Hess states that the strategic plan addresses Parks management in a proactive manner. First, he says it does this by establishing the maintenance and improvement program, which is a document that would organize and outline project priorities at all ten parks. It would be a way to log completed activities and prescribe activities before they happen. The plan will guide the allocation of resources from one fiscal year to the next. Hess states they want to encourage the board to look for opportunities on an annual basis wherever possible to continue cooperation and increase public engagement and outreach. He suggests conducting targeted community meetings with the parks committee, improving coordination with parks staff and developing an understanding of communities for each park. Another goal is to improve customer service and encourage training in customer service to improve skills.

Hess then reviews the budget analysis. He says the Parks Division's constrained budget, significantly impacted by the recession, presents operational limitations to maintaining and improving the parks. Hess mentions that they are going to start tracking expenses by park, which is something that was not done before. He states the vast majority of expenditures come from Mooney Grove Park. He also states that there are several grant efforts as well and increased public outreach to better the parks.

Hess notes increased changes/improvements in safety measures, conservation efforts, and looking for opportunities to work with other entities. He says the Manager works

strategically to identify trees that have the highest risk for tree mortality and they continue to coordinate with the Museum Director and the public for the use of the museum. Hess states that film scouting has increased and there have been opportunities. He closes by stating one of the main goals of the Strategic Business Plan is to ensure positive growth for the future.

Chairman Chrisman says that it was a very well put presentation and that they need to make sure they clearly state the projects, what the plans are, and the priorities.

Hess asks if there are any questions or comments regarding the presentation.

Supervisor Shuklian excuses herself due to her needing to be at an unveiling of the mural at the farm bureau.

Hess informed the PAC that he is going to present this same information to the Board and concluded his presentation.

8. Committee Member Matters:

Hess says they invited prospective member Anne Parigen to come tonight, but she was not able to make it.

9. Parks Manager Update:

Committee Member Pilegard informed the Committee that several seasonal employees were promoted to fulltime positions. States they interviewed 22 people and had three no shows.

10. Next Meeting Date & Adjournment:

Hess states that the next Board meeting will be on June 6, 2017 at 7:00 pm at the Board Chambers in Visalia. Staff will send reminders of the meeting.

Meeting adjourned.