

Sports Commission Meeting Minutes

Thursday, December 21, 2017

Langston-Brown CC, MPR

Time: 7:00-9:00 PM

Commission Members Present:

Shirley Brothwell, Chair

Jessica Paska

Janet Eichers

Sherry Kohan

Justin Wilt

John Bacon

Steve Severn

Commission Members Absent:

David Tornquist

Patricia Trapanese

Drew Murray

County/APS Staff:

Josh Colman, SC Liaison

Deb DeFranco, APS

Please note: Agenda items may not be in chronological order.

Approval of Past Meeting Minutes

[8:50pm-8:52pm]

Review and motion to approve October and November meeting minutes, seconded, approved.

Commission Member Reports

Old Business

4MRV

[7:06-7:11pm]

Joint Sports Commission and Park and Recreation Commission letter completed and submitted to the 4MRV Working Group Chair. Should be bigger impact as a joint-letter.

Gunston Community Field

[7:12-7:22pm]

- Sports Commission submitted a list of questions to DPR with respect to the fields and future plans.
- Best case scenario would be artificial turf, however, APS is considering the location as possible future site to be used.
- Indication that field could be included in future CIP work.
- Difficult field to find advocacy since it's a community field- no formal groups use.
- What should SC do next?
 - Could begin to have conversations with Board Members.
 - Could go back to APS- is siting trailers on the field the only option? What other options could be considered?
 - Should other commissions get involved? Park and Recreation Commission may have interest given that it is a casual use space.
- Discussion on school space needs- schools won't agree until new boundaries are set and they have an idea of future populations.

Annual Plan

[8:57- 9:06pm]

- Discussion on idea of an interim meeting to finalize annual plan.
- Group needs to go through suggestions and be reasonable in what we can add to the list.
- Jessica will compile top three suggestions from Annual plan- members should send Jessica their top three suggestions.
- Brief discussion on underserved communities and what the topic means.
- Group agrees to a one-hour interim meeting to work on annual plan.

New Business

Virginia Highlands Fencing

[7:22-7:26 pm]

In late November/early December DPR indicated that part of the fencing would be removed from VA Highlands softball fields.

- Shirley and Justin met with DPR senior leadership about the decision- expressed concerns on safety, maintenance, and communication of decision.

- Park and Recreation Commission has talked about the issue previously. Facing constant pressure from the neighborhood. Sent letters forward.
- Issue is quickly becoming something the SC needs to spend time on.
- Not enough time from decision being made to implementation.
- Wish/desire that part of the pilot was to unlock fences and test that as part of the pilot (prior to taking down).

Issue continued to be discussed during Christian Dorsey visit.

Christian Dorsey Visit

[7:27-8:50 pm]

Christian Dorsey visited the Sports Commission as Board Member Liaison.

- Shirley sent some general questions to Christian in advance:
 - Advice for Sports Commission improving its impact on issues
 - What input is most helpful in general and this year in particular?
 - Topics within the charge to spend more time on
 - VA Highland process/discussion
 - PFRC Request and Response
- Advice for SC improving its impact and effectiveness. SC is in a very difficult place. While it is the sole advocate for sports, its role also touches on other issues like land use. For land use issues and light issues the Board would look primarily to other commissions for advice. Some commissions have a much more defined role, but SC's is often difficult to determine.
 - In general, would encourage all members to take advantage of opportunities to speak to the Board as much as possible- raise issues the Board ought to be thinking about. Public comment has an important impact.
 - Continue to deliver substantive letters on issues. Sports Commission has been diligent on including information on the nature of the discussion- these are constructive and helpful.
- Topics within the charge to spend more time on?
 - General reluctance to say certain things should or should not be on an agenda- a benefit of the commission is that they tell the Board areas to focus on. However, topics that have come up or seem important include:
 - ADA Access- a focus on improving access to facilities
 - Kettler Ice Rink- Board doesn't have much information on how the rink is being utilized.
 - Sports- Volleyball, Basketball, Gymnastics- would welcome more information or exploration of those sports.
 - Clinics and Other Vehicles to Introduce people to sports- room for the County to grow and introduce more people into sports programs.
- Things to Focus on This Year
 - Budget Issues/Concern- would love Sports commission guidance on impact, prioritization of decisions. Specific guidance on budget decisions can be very helpful.

Discussion/Questions with Commission Members

- Discussion on softball field maintenance problems and denial of requested partnerships.
 - APS give great deference to principals on these decisions, but this is an issue the SC should be raising.
 - There are models that exist in other communities- partnering with businesses to advance that.
 - Board can convene stakeholders at APS- identify areas of concern that people have.
 - Business signage has been an issue in the past. Can we find a way to allow signage?
 - Can be a complicated issue, but needs to be looked at.
- Discussion on role of Sports Commission as an advocacy voice.
 - Board welcomes the advocacy role. Sports Commission is balanced in that you're mindful of other areas that are affected, but it's also important to advocate for current/future needs.
 - Commission needs to be comfortable calling out the Board- if a decision leaves a gap or a void that will have to be addressed- that needs to be brought up to the Board.
- PFRC Decision
 - Overview of Board/Christian decision in denying Sports Commission membership to PFRC.
 - Understands need for Sports Commission to be involved in discussions at the beginning.
 - Part of the issue is the goal of making processes simpler and not making groups as large or inefficient. If there's no programmatic decision/changes- it doesn't immediately speak to the idea that they need to give a commission an opportunity to weigh in.
 - How to get SC involved earlier?
 - There's no default mechanism for this happening. Christian will work to talk to Shirley/SC earlier during initial scope conversations. Project may indicate no need for SC involvement, but is willing to talk it out.
- VA Highlands
 - Sports Commission feels blindsided by County Manager recommendation- not consistent with Arlington value system. Feels like there was a lot of input from community, but not from users.
 - Board sometimes assumes conversations have taken place, goal was to find more use for others. Thought was: no harm to softball group, great benefit to community.
 - Lesson learned from Board perspective and DPR perspective.
 - Feedback/lesson- not assuming conversations have happened with all affected parties.
 - How do we find compromise on the use of public athletic facilities that can provide a casual user an opportunity to use, while not degrading the space?
 - Board needs help on this question.

- Letters in response to VA Highland- safety was very compelling, yet informed by the Bluemont experience that this model worked well. Doesn't yet have the input that informs the safety decision.
 - Discussion on how Bluemont is considered a success- how has that been measured?
- Discussion on safety issue and limited space at VA Highlands.
- Letter Writing- How many letters is too many to send to the Board?
 - Sports Commission has a long way to go before that becomes an issue.
 - Board strongly encourages sending letters. If it's based on an agenda item, not only receives it in email, but also has them attached to the Board agenda.
- Discussion with Mark Sarver- Softball Player
 - Decision to open fields has softball program going backwards. Softball community was not consulted- their voice was not heard.
 - Discussion on safety aspect- softball community is scared that bystanders are in jeopardy. Balls hit the fences often. Community is concerned the Board did not challenge DPR on safety.
 - Idea of Compromise- how can groups partner together in making decisions about parks- recognition that these are County-wide facilities, not community fields. How can we recognize/accommodate people that feel like the community promise has been taken away from them? How can we recognize these realities, but do something that doesn't worsen softball situation?
 - Additional discussion on compromise- user groups would like to see some reciprocity. If community came back and said they wanted the fences down, but was willing to help take care of the fields (trash cleanup, etc.), it'd feel better.
 - Board Input- Board is always trying to figure out how to best let staff do the job they are hired to do. If on day one there is a realization that there's a safety issue we're not comfortable with, staff will come to the Board and say we need to revisit. Government needs to have staff have the flexibility to make this type of decision.
 - Additional Safety Discussion
 - Discussion on programmed space vs. community needs- ultimately some parts of that discussion may be irreconcilable.
- Discussion on Sports Commission making sure it's input is valued. How can SC know that the Board will think about/consider the Sports Commission when making decisions?
 - Christian will give some thought to this- SC is often thought about secondarily- how can that change? As liaison, he will think about this.
 - Additional idea- meet with other members of the Board. It's great to get to know the Board and have Board associate you with Sports Commission.
- Christian is appreciative of the effort/dedication the Sports Commission puts forward. Very appreciate of the times they spend working/thinking about how to make Arlington better.

Meeting ends 9:06pm

Christian Dorsey, County Board Liaison

Attest:

Josh Colman

Josh Colman, Staff Liaison