



Parks & Recreation Commission – MEETING MINUTES

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The regular meeting of the Parks & Recreation Commission was held on February 6, 2025, at 3:00pm at the Great Neck Pavilion, 2513 Shorehaven Dr, Virginia Beach, VA 23454.

CALL TO ORDER

Chair Phillip Hines called the meeting to order at 3:01 pm. A quorum was present.

ROLL CALL

MEMBERS PRESENT: Tommy Altman, Daniel Edwards (Vice Chair) (Via Webex), Phillip Hines (Chair), Sebastian Johnston (Secretary), Barrett Lankford, Ben Messer, Clinton Mills Jr., Kathryn Moran, Myra Payne, Eugene Towler, David Wiener, Debbie Wiggins

MEMBERS ABSENT: Stephen Rockefeller

LIAISONS PRESENT: Cal Jackson-Green (City Council), Kristyn Worthley (Foundation)

CITY STAFF PRESENT: Michael Kirschman, Shirley Deibler, Chad Morris, Frank Fentress, Taryn Buckley-Thiel, Kara Shoup, Jane Jagodzinski, Sherry Hawkins, Amanda Parrish

1. Resignation

No resignations this month.

2. Student Members

No new student members this month.

3. New appointees to P&R Commission

No new members this month.

MINUTES

The December 5, 2024, meeting minutes were unanimously approved.

HOUSEKEEPING

No housekeeping items were discussed.



AGENDA ADDITIONS

No agenda additions.

CORRESPONDENCE / PUBLIC COMMENT

1. Aragona Civic League

Lorraine Samko, president of the Aragona Civic League, presented on the civic league's goal of developing a neighborhood park on Jericho Road in the Aragona area of Virginia Beach. This land is current owned by Virginia Beach City Public Schools. The group seeks to both preserve the property and build a small park that will serve as an ability park for children and seniors in the area. The land will need to be transferred to the City of Virginia Beach to begin the process of developing a park.

Ms. Samko will be recommending that the park be transferred from Virginia Beach City Public Schools to the City of Virginia Beach at an upcoming City Council meeting (April, May, or June 2025). She asked for the Parks & Recreation Commission's support during this request period.

Chair Hines stated that the Commission will review the handout provided, discuss at the next meeting, and draft a letter of support if they wish to support the initiative.

Q&A/Discussion:

- 1) Commissioner Eugene Towler inquired if the surrounding community will be affected. Ms. Samko stated that the community's neighbors will not be negatively affected.
- 2) Vice Chair Daniel Edwards added that the Virginia Beach School Board-City Council committee, with two members each, as well as two representatives from Aragona Civic League, is meeting to identify potential boundary adjustments to accommodate a potential park. The Committee's timeline is to make a recommendation to the School Board this summer.

OLD BUSINESS

No old business was discussed.

NEW BUSINESS

1. Robo Mowers

Chair Hines asked about the feasibility of the department utilizing robo mowers. Director Kirschman stated that the department has investigated them, but they will not serve its needs at this time.

Park and Landscape Services Administrator Frank Fentress added that robo mowers' need for perimeter wiring and potential vandalism are among the reasons preventing their adoption by the department. He did share a goal of potentially utilizing them in the future, but now is not a recommended time for adoption.

2. Earth Day

Amanda Parrish, Coordinator – Park Events, Programs & Special Use, discussed her unit's efforts to coordinate greater Earth Day activation opportunities this year. Rather than a single day, the event's activities will span April 19-26, 2025. This year will feature opportunities to engage with after-school sites and more daily events for community members.

The below ad will be featured in the 2025 Spring Guide:



3. Fee Increase

Chair Hines requested a discussion of increasing membership rates beyond the standard annual increase given recreation center membership rates seen across the nation. He also proposed the recreation centers staying open later to meet the department's goal of keeping people busy later into the evening at events such as Parks After Dark.

Director Kirschman advised against benchmarking this department against others, as there are tremendous differences in how P&R departments are funded, the types of amenities and services they provide, community outcomes, and community demographics and politics. Additionally, the Virginia Beach recreation centers are one of the most successful in the nation with extremely high outcomes and cost recovery.

Due to the department's 1987 bond referendum (\$32,850,000), which included a 3.8 cent increase to real estate taxes (later updated to 4.6 cents), funding is already provided for the recreation centers' debt service, operation, and maintenance. One of the original goals of the recreation center system was for the system to be 40% cost recovery, with dedicated bond funding covering 60% of costs and direct earned revenues covering 40%. The department has achieved this operating goal.

This year's budget submission includes an increase of the annual adult resident rate (\$115 to \$120). The department believes this is a reasonable increase. With record memberships and visitation in 2024 due to affordable memberships and a high 50% renewal rate, staff do not believe there is justification to further increase the membership rate. Additionally, the rate of increase for memberships over the past 15 years has outpaced inflation, and per survey data the #2 reason residents do not join the recreation center is "Fees are too high". Only "Not enough time" is a higher reason for not joining, and this is outside the control of the department. There is a real fear that steeper increases in the membership rate over a short amount of time can actually result in lower revenues by negatively impacting the renewal rate.

Director Kirschman added that every \$1 raised does not equate to an extra \$1 raised for the general fund, as the recreation centers are funded by a dedicated tax. Any funds remaining at the end of the fiscal year are transferred to the recreation center fund balance. This fund is intended to grow over time to fund major capital repairs and improvements to the centers. While the renovation and modernization needs of the older recreation centers are vast, no amount of increased membership fees will come close to meeting the true needs and will likely only result in citizen complaints and potentially lower earned revenues.

In terms of changing the recreation centers' hours, Director Kirschman stated that any changes have a large impact on staff, while historical data demonstrates that they will not be largely utilized by members. The department continuously reviews hours of operation and services and has adjusted hours on numerous occasions (especially since COVID-19). It is important to note that while remaining open for longer hours has a direct cost, this department has shifted to remain open on certain holidays, as well as opening earlier in the mornings based on demand, to be more available for the community.

City Council approves all fee and charges through the annual budget process. The Commission advises City Council and may choose to individually recommend higher membership rates.

Q&A/Open Discussion:

- 1) Commissioner Towler asked where the department's 50% discount for eligible citizens came from. While it was established before his tenure with the city, Director Kirschman stated that this department exists to provide recreational opportunities, ensure those opportunities are provided to all, and remove any access barriers. He added that, through the Community Cares Fund, distributed from the Parks & Recreation Foundation, a member's balance can be reduced to \$0.

- 2) Commissioner Tommy Altman suggested the monthly membership option be reinstated. Director Kirschman stated that this could be brought back with discussion but noted it can be difficult to track and ultimately costs the department more money to manage.
- 3) Chair Hines inquired if the gymnasiums would be popular if they were kept open later at night. An additional fee could be charged for access. Director Kirschman stated that logistics would need to be worked out to determine the feasibility. Members may not like having to pay an additional fee for later access.
- 4) Commissioner Towler suggested that a nonmember gymnasium time be established. This would allow nonmembers to utilize the gymnasiums for a fee.

4. Sledding at Mount Trashmore

Chair Hines asked for the background on why sledding is not allowed at Mount Trashmore after snow events. Director Kirschman informed the Commission that sledding has been forbidden at Mount Trashmore following a 1996 snow event, where over 3,000 people descended upon Mount Trashmore for sledding. Nearly two dozen were treated for injuries, a few severe. Knowing the dangers and allow sledding could lead to future legal issues.

STAFF REPORT

Jane Jagodzinski provided an updated overview of the Sports Management Unit. The unit manages city-wide athletics (various sports' youth and adult athletic leagues), city-wide field scheduling (all park and elementary school fields/courts), PAAC and City View Park (mix of tourism events and local league play), facility rentals (athletic fields and tennis courts), and facility contract management (several golf courses, Pickleball VB, Sportsplex, Hampton Roads Soccer Complex, and multiple youth baseball complexes). Managing these areas of the department includes obtaining and screening volunteer coaches, allocating fields, and ensuring cooperative efforts from local associations to organize programs.

Ms. Jagodzinski noted this work does face several challenges, including staffing (there are currently 9 full-time and 18 part-time*), a lack of referees and officials, and a lengthy process to request approval to use Virginia Beach City Public School's fields.

**This is the highest part-time staffing level since before COVID-19.*

Q&A:

- 1) Chair Hines asked if there is any interest in converting the baseball fields to synthetic grass. Ms. Jagodzinski said yes, especially for the infields (outfields can remain grass).

LIAISON REPORTS

1. City Council

The new District 7 City Councilmember and City Council liaison to the Commission, Cal "Cash" Jackson-Green, introduced himself to the Commission. He stated that he will be studying, listening, and making smart decisions for District 7 and Virginia Beach as a whole during his tenure.

Q&A:

- 1) Chair Hines asked if he has any interest in pursuing a parks and recreation bond. Councilmember Jackson-Green stated it is something he would research so that it is proposed at the right time.

DIRECTOR'S REPORT

1. Director Kirschman informed the Commission that the CIP Retreat can be viewed online:
 - Part 1: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=06Nnk8qT4f0>
 - Part 2: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=PM0mA5ZNuLw>
2. Parks After Dark has received Virginia Beach City Public School's approval to use two schools as additional event sites this summer—Rosemont Elementary and College Park Elementary.

GOOD AND WELFARE

1. Chair Hines asked when Three Oaks Path would be open. Parks, Planning and Design (PDD) Administrator Chad Morris informed him it should be opening soon.
2. Chair Hines asked when the Mount Trashmore slides will open. PDD Administrator Morris stated they should open in the spring of 2025.
3. PDD Administrator Morris informed the Commission of the three upcoming community meetings to review the three current concepts for Rudee Park. Attendees will not be selecting a final design but will select key concepts from each design to be compiled into a hybrid, final design. This final design will be brought to City Council.
 - a. February 10: Green Run High School, 6:00-7:30p
 - b. February 11: Cox High School, 6:00-7:30p
 - c. February 12: Virginia Beach Convention Center, 6:00-7:30p
4. Executive Assistant Taryn Buckley-Thiel offered physical copies of the department's fiscal year 2023-2024 Annual Report. The digital version is posted to the Virginia Beach Parks & Recreation website and can be found at https://issuu.com/vbparksrec/docs/2024fy-annual_report-web.
5. The next meeting will be held at 3:00pm on March 6, 2025. The meeting location will be the Parks & Recreation Administration Building, 2154 Landstown Road, Virginia Beach, Virginia 23456.

ADJOURNMENT

There being no further business, Chair Hines called for adjournment. No one opposed. Meeting adjourned at 4:45 pm.

ATTACHMENTS (3)

1. Meeting Agenda – February 6, 2025
2. Jericho Road Property Handout
3. Sports Management Unit Overview Presentation

