

PARKS AND RECREATION MASTER PLAN REVIEW COMMITTEE
CITY OF AURORA
September 10, 2009

The Parks and Recreation Master Plan Review Committee of the City of Aurora, Ohio, met on Thursday, September 10, 2009 at City Hall Council Chambers, for the purpose of holding a regular meeting. Mr. Kraus, called the meeting to order at 6:30p.m.

ROLL CALL

Present: Earl Biederman
Sean Devins
Dennis Kovach – entered 7:00p.m.
Marcell Malecki
Rita Scott
Kurt Ruehr
Bob Toth

Absent: Pete Conces
Tony Gramm
George Hettinger
John Kudley Jr.
Kristin Lieberth

Also Present: James Kraus – Parks and Recreation Director
Madeleine Marazzi - Recording Secretary

Mr. Kraus (Parks and Recreation Director) described an overview of what the committee would do. He asked for each committee member to give a brief introduction of themselves.

INTRODUCTION & ELECTION OF COMMITTEE OFFICERS: Mr. Kraus suggested the election of officers be delayed until next month when more committee members would be in attendance.

CITIZEN'S COMMENTS: Tom Dreher stated he was in attendance to represent the Buildings and Grounds Committee which was initiated in 2008. The committee's role in city government was to inventory the properties and buildings that the city owns and make recommendations as to maintenance, uses and applications, this is the extent of their role. Mr. Dreher stated they did not have any influence in terms of making decisions, they can only recommend what they see. There are 51 properties and

buildings that the city owns. Most of these occurred through the citizenry approving 6.5 million dollar amount through an election. This money was to be used by the city fathers to acquire land for conservation, education and recreation. Those three elements are part of the deed restrictions of all the properties that were acquired.

Mr. Dreher stated the Buildings and Ground Committee had toured each facility once overall and they are doing a second tour presently. We visit properties, make assessments of them and forward those recommendations to city council and to the office of the Mayor. He also stated if there is anything the Buildings and Grounds Committee can do to assist the Parks and Recreation Master Plan Review Committee, they are more than pleased to do so. They have a lot of data, information and reports that available for review and explanation.

Mr. Dreher stated the P. & R. Master Plan Review Committee has a challenge that is complex and serious and will require a lot of concentration. The committee is being asked to look at properties and buildings and make recommendations. The uses of the facilities and grounds the committee might be asked to make decisions relative to preservation or demolition. What may make the task more complex, are some of these properties are landmark, meaning they have historical value and come with a host of different criteria.

Mr. Dreher thanked the committee for their willingness to serve and the hard work that is to come and again offered his assistance if needed.

Mike DeMay, 887 South Parkview Dr., stated he has been in Aurora since 1992 and loves the town and Recreation Department. He has heard common themes from a lot of people such as connectivity and recreation for all ages. He felt the center of town is maxed out but we have a lot of properties that we don't use and should be developed. He felt the Chesneys property was a key piece due to it bordering our city and links with Mantua. There is not anything from Portage County with a signature in Aurora, and felt better communications should be established with Portage County to acquire funds since Aurora passes all or Portage County recreation levies.

NEW BUSINESS:

Overview of process: Mr. Kraus stated a Parks and Recreation Master Plan were done in 2000. Recently the City of Aurora updated their overall master plan and one of the recommendations was to review and update the Parks and Recreation Master Plan. Mr. Kraus stated there are some things that can still be implemented some updated and continued. There are properties that have been acquired since 2000 that will need to be reviewed.

Mrs. Scott asked how much was left in the fund (from the levy) to purchase properties. Mr. Dreher explained the city made an acquisition recently through the federal government and will be reimbursed for that in the amount of around three hundred fifty thousand dollars. When that arrives the fund totally

will have around four hundred thousand dollars available. Mr. Dreher stated there is an organization called The Trust for Public Land that spend massive amounts of money to make contributions to municipalities to acquire properties which the city or municipality contributes as little as 10%. Mr. Dreher stated currently there is a piece of property that is being considered by The Trust for Public Land for Aurora which is called Spring Hill Farm. There is a strong chance that the three hundred thousand that will come back to the fund from the federal government could be used to make the Spring Hill Farm acquisition. Mr. Dreher stated this has not been determined yet but he wanted the committee to realize that money might not be available. Mr. Dreher stated the levy fund has around forty five thousand dollars left from the levy of 6.5 million dollars. Of that money the city was able to acquire seven hundred and fifty acres in addition to the thirteen to fifteen hundred acres.

Mr. Kraus stated the overall hopes and ideas from this committee and plan will be specific uses of properties which include buildings if there are on the property to then hopefully formulate the overall plan. This may mean there might be properties that the committee feels are excess and could be sold, it could mean there are structures that are not useful and need to be torn down. He felt everything should be on the table. If there is an idea or a program or land use for something that is need that the committee feels they need than it should be brought up for investigation. Mr. Kraus asked the committee to keep in mind that the recommendations might be eliminated or changed by council when it goes through the process.

Mr. Kraus stated one of the things that would be done would be to take a tour of the properties that the committee would be making decisions. One of the things that will be done as we go through the process is to look at the Parks and Recreation Department and see how it operates such as general policies and programs. We need to look at recreation from the competitive to the recreational level the whole spectrum. There are a lot of organizations and entities that are involved and will be invited to come to the committee meetings and try to evaluate and see as a whole what other ways as a whole we can improve recreational opportunities. It will be facets of connectivity, programmatic, marketing, sponsorships, partnerships, volunteers, special events, etc.

Mr. Biederman stated to keep in mind the properties that are adjacent to Aurora that are part of the Audubon Society for education and connectivity.

Mr. Kraus stated a goal will be to get everyone in the city on a collective page that can move forward as a group. Hopefully the committees work will help solidify everything and continue to move forward in the next number of years.

Mr. Kraus stated surveys have been done in the recent past and results will be discussed. The end goal will be to have specific uses of properties, buildings, goals, ideas for programs, actions items and time frames.

Mr. Ruehr asked if there was a list of restrictions for the land in question. Mr. Kraus stated each property has a deed and some have restrictions. As an example the wetlands property was bought with the Western Reserve Land Conservancy which have very specific conservation restrictions. Mr. Kraus stated when the properties are reviewed the restrictions will be outlined.

Mrs. Scott asked if we had a deadline to accomplish this. Mr. Kraus stated about 6 to 9 months at the most.

Mr. Devins asked what was the status of the golf course. Mr. Kovach stated it was a nice piece of land but at this time it is overpriced. There are things on the property that make it not totally available for recreation such as wet lands, and chemicals that have been put on the property such as fairways and grass that would need to be addressed. Financially the city can not afford this property; the city needs to take care of the buildings and grounds that it owns first.

Mr. Dreher stated he voted with the two other councilmen that wanted to keep the golf course property. They felt it was the best time to buy the property due to it not decreasing in property value. It is 224 prime property in the center of town that the city should of run as a golf course through an independent company as long as we could afford it. If it was not a profitable business then it would have been converted into a city recreation center. He hopes that in the future there will be an opportunity to make the acquisition again.

Mr. Kraus asked each member to give their initial thoughts for the Parks and Recreation as a whole. The consensus among the committee was to have connectivity among the properties for bike paths, walking paths, to be creative with properties, have multi use for each properties, additional gathering events with possibly one signature event, develop Sunny Lake more, marketing, publications, further development of Kiwanis Moore Park, centralized, make it fun, protecting wet lands, keep in mind all ages.

Mr. Kraus stated he would like the city to concentrate on the properties they own and move forward with different things then once the citizens see what is happening they are more likely to go forward also with bigger plans.

Mr. Kraus stated there are some things in the works at this time such as: The Kiwanis Moore Park has a conceptual plan that has been approved, there is a tentative plan for the Hartman property that has not been officially approved all the way through, there is a connectivity plan which the Planning and Zoning Commission have started on primarily focusing on the center of the city. Mr. Kraus stated this was a good time to pull all this information together and move forward.

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Next meeting: The meetings will be the second Thursday of each month at 6:30pm at Council Chambers. There might be extra meeting held at a different time i.e. bus trips to view the properties. It was decided to meet at two different times to accommodate everyone. The first tour will be on Saturday, October 3, at 1:00pm and Thursday, October 8, at 3:00. Mr. Kraus stated he would make sure there are no senior bus trips for those days and will confirm times with everyone.

ADJOURNMENT:

Mr. Kovach moved to adjourn: Mr. Biederman seconded and the meeting adjourned at 8:00pm

Mr. Kraus – Acting Chairman

Madeleine Marazzi – Recording Secretary