

PARKS AND RECREATION MASTER PLAN REVIEW COMMITTEE
CITY OF AURORA
December 3, 2009

The Parks and Recreation Master Plan Review Committee of the City of Aurora, Ohio, met on Thursday, December 4, 2009 at City Hall Council Chambers, for the purpose of holding a regular meeting. Mr. Kraus, called the meeting to order at 6:34p.m.

ROLL CALL

Present: Earl Biederman
Pete Conces
Sean Devins
Tony Gramm
Dennis Kovach
John Kudley Jr.
Rita Scott
Kurt Ruehr
Bob Toth

Absent: George Hettinger
Kristin Lieberth
Marcell Malecki

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

APPROVAL OF MINUTES:

Mr. Conces moved to approve the minutes of the October 8, 2009 Parks and Recreation Master Plan Review Committee. Mr. Kovach seconded and the motion passed 8-0 with a voice vote.

NEW BUSINESS:

Organization Overviews: Mr. Kraus stated the main objective of the evening was to get background information from most of the sports associations or authorities that we work with within the city or county.

Portage County Park District: Christine Craycroft, Portage Park District Director stated the Portage Park District is a county wide metro park type organization. Their mission is to conserve Portage County's natural and cultural heritage. They are an independent government agency governed by five park commissioners who serve as volunteers and are appointed for a three-year term that is renewable by the county probate judge. They were formed in 1991 and are still reliant on the county general fund for their operating budget. They have been successful in getting grants and donations and working with partners in the region from anywhere from individual townships and cities to other park districts and non-profit organizations. Ms. Craycroft stated they have had over eight million dollars worth of grants and donations over the years. They are looking forward to getting a levy passed at some point. Ms. Craycroft stated the park board has formed a foundation and are in the process of soliciting candidates for trustees to the foundation board and invited anyone that might be interested in a position to fill out an application.

Ms. Craycroft stated the top priority in Aurora is the extension of the Headwater's Trail from Mantua through Aurora to Solon, which is along the old railroad corridor. The trail is done to Mennonite Road, which is the extent of Mantua Village, and there is about 2 miles, which is in private ownership. She is working on getting acquisition to the corridor from the landowners who are willing to work with her. This would take it out to Chamberline Rd. which the park district owns 95 acres on the West side of Chamberline Rd. which could make a nice trail head facility. At the moment it is closed to the public due to not having funds to develop and maintain the property. Ms. Craycroft stated one nice thing about the park district is that they are county wide and can work across those jurisdictional boundaries. The problem with the railroad west from Chamberline road through Aurora is that it is still owned by Norfolk Southern Railroad. They have been trying to get them to move off center on the project, and the best that they have received from them is they are willing to possibly consider a lease agreement with them. The railroad does not want to give up any assets at this point but she is cautiously optimistic that we can get a foot in the door to move this along faster. There is a variety of funding available for that corridor which is at the top of the list for regional funding.

Ms. Craycroft stated they would like to partner with conserving the Chagrin River corridor. Other opportunities with the Park District to partner in Aurora include eventually stewardship in more nature programs and conservation land that Aurora owns. Another opportunity is the Tinkers Creek corridor, which connects Streetsboro through Aurora, Reminderville Area and Twinsburg.

Ms. Craycroft encouraged the Committee to think about other opportunities if we can't get the trailhead along the railroad corridor, the funding could still possibly be available if it was routed a different way.

Aurora City Schools: Mr. Paul Powers Athletic Director for Aurora City Schools stated he has to schedule the heavy demand for athletic space. He felt sometimes he has to look at the amount of programs that are being offered vs. the facility as not to put stress on the facilities. The schools are trying to establish practice fields to allow rotation of the fields to keep the fields in good shape.

Mr. Powers stated there are parking issues when you are using the practice fields and the stadium at the same time. Baseball and softball fields are not too bad but when it comes to soccer and football practice fields and grass it wears out quick.

Mr. Powers stated we are behind in comparison do other districts. We don't have enough game facilities, which include bathroom facilities. The biggest demand sport is basketball; also the swim team has to travel to Hiram to use their pool for practice, which is high in rental fees. Mr. Powers stated they are probably paying around \$30,000 a year in rental fees for ice and pool.

Aurora Baseball League: Mr. Bob Boyle, stated the league has between 700-750 children, ages 6 and 15 and are playing from April through July and are made up of both recreational and travel leagues. A board of volunteers runs the league strictly. They also run the lower league girls softball. The funds that are raised by sponsorship and tournaments are used to run the league. They work very closely with the Recreation Department on the fields that are available in Aurora. His vision would be to have a baseball complex where there are multiple fields complete with restrooms and concession stands and would be suitable to hold multiple tournaments throughout the year.

Mr. Kudley asked what their financial commitment were in maintaining the fields. Mr. Boyle stated they have donated money to improve dugouts, fencing and renovating to improve the city fields in lieu of paying for the use the fields.

Mr. Conces asked how many crewmembers were dedicated to baseball needs during the season. Mr. Kraus stated we have 2 full time staff that work year round that do all outdoor field related items such as fertilizing, lining of the soccer fields etc. In the summer there are 12 part time crewmembers working 20 to 40 hours a week starting in May to July.

Aurora Youth Basketball Association: Jeff Skoniesky stated seven years ago the Aurora Youth Basketball Association was formed in cooperation with the High School and the Aurora Parks and Recreation Department. It was suggested at that time to have a parent group take over the active role of running the travel program. The travel program in this instance is community travel basketball, which is a step above the recreation basketball program. The participants have to live and attend the school district to play. It has gone well in the seven years they have had the program and are totally reliant on the school district, which has been a nice partnership. The program is designed for 4th – 6th grade teams' boys and girls, with 69 children participating in the program. The tryouts are held in October and practices start in November. The league starts in December to March and they play 7 to 10 games. In the last few years they have received some good cooperation from the coaches to put on clinics, and we have given back to the high school programs by helping with summer camps and team meals etc. The children are starting to recognize some of the players and coaches, which help in their program.

Mr. Skoniesky stated they run two practices a week at 1 ½ hours to 2 hours each which we did not have a problem with when they first started. In the last few years it has put a stress on the schools for the gym time due to many programs. They have had to go outside of the city to rent time from the Pinnacle in Twinsburg and have contacted the Twinsburg Recreation Department about using the gym for the Aurora children.

Mr. Skoniesky stated we are indoors about five months out of the year, which creates a need and suggested we plan for indoor courts both for children and adults. The city has really grown and it is time we update the indoor facilities.

Mr. Conces stated between the recreation basketball program and the Aurora Youth Basketball Association there are about 520 children playing basketball along with adult basketball program, which are totally relying on the school district for gym time, which is stressed.

Aurora Youth Tackle Football Association: John Wells stated they operate a tackle football program for first to sixth grade players and a youth cheerleading program for second to sixth grade. The Association was formed in the year 2000 when the city approached them asking a group of parents to take over the tackle football program. The city had previously run the program for a number of years and had limited the program to two teams per age group and capped the players to 50.

Mr. Wells stated they play their 3rd and 4th, and 5th and 6th grade teams in the Western Reserve Youth Football League and compete against local communities. They presently have four teams in each of the leagues. They also have a Mighty Might program for 1st and 2nd grades that play within the Aurora community. This is a lower competitive form of football and only practice in a limited basis. At present they have approximately 200 youth football players and 100 cheerleaders.

Mr. Wells stated the partnership at this point is primarily with the middle and high school programs. They practice primarily on the high school practice field for the 3rd -6th grade teams, four nights per week for two hours before school and three nights a week once school starts. This year they were fortunate to play all their games in the high school facility. The practice for the Mighty Might program is primarily at Leighton School with practice times on an hour basis and plays their games on the practice fields. This year they were fortunate to play two games on the high school facility. Their teams and part of the problem with the rotation of the fields cause part of the parking dilemma that Mr. Powers are experiencing for the high school.

Mr. Wells stated with the partnership with the school they donate funds back to the high school program, such as funds to help with the turf facility or equipment needs for the high school or cheerleading programs, they have also done some work on the Leighton field facility with donations to the school board.

The practices start in July and depending how far they advance in the playoffs, they might have teams that are competing typically into early November. They also play a senior bowl game against Kenston. Mr. Kraus has opened up Sunny Lake Park one night a week for them to practice to have the lights available.

Mr. Wells stated what he felt the needs going forward are more practice fields so the rotation of fields can be accomplished and have a mixture of days to play. Any kind of complex would be useful with concession stands and restrooms. This would help with parking and separating the groups.

Aurora United Girls Soccer: Pete Conces stated the program has nine teams with over 100 girls participating. Soccer runs 10 months out of the year, which runs into conflict with the schools in the fall and baseball in the spring. The biggest expense at the moment is rental of facilities for indoor soccer. They have spent \$8,000 to rent the facility and \$10,000 for them to play games at an indoor soccer facility. It is a small organization of 100 children and the fee to play is only \$120 per session, which uses most of the funds up.

Mr. Conces stated as a Parks and Recreation Board member and of this panel he would argue against the city even entertaining trying to resolve the issue due to it being elective. The parents of the children who want to play the sport will incur he felt when you play indoor soccer through the winter those costs. We can't and should not compete with those kinds of facilities.

Mr. Conces stated they purchase the paint products for the Parks and Recreation crew to line the fields in the spring and fall. They utilize the cities soccer goals and fields and work around other sports at the time the field is needed.

Mr. Conces stated as the United Soccer representative present the need is he felt for the girls and boys United Soccer team would be more practice fields. Soccer does not need a defined space it just needs green space, which could be placed anywhere, and the city owns plenty of green space to be used for this purpose, it just needs to be developed. This would take a lot of pressure of the schools and their facilities.

Discussion was held on having a facility with a main surface that could be used for maximized usage.

Academy Volleyball Club: Deborah Wordell stated the club started in 2007 with three teams here in Aurora and used the High School gym time. They have now expanded to 35 teams with 340 children participating.

There are travel teams and low-key competition that is less expensive so more children can participate. The club rents 28 hours a week of gym time at Pinnacle (formerly the Edge) using all five of their volleyball courts. From January to May

The club uses four courts about 4 hours a week at Aurora High School, and about 6 hours a week at Hiram College. It is about 180 hours of court time a week from January to May. They also have programming throughout the summer that is not travel but are clinics and camps and private lessons.

Ms. Wordell stated the clubs goal is to continue with the partnerships they have but would also like to partner with the Parks and Recreation Dept. The club had 770 girls between the ages of 8–18 from different surrounding communities try out in two weekends. The interest is there and they would like to partner to offer more opportunities for the children to play. Ms. Wordell stated the program runs on a budget of half a million dollars which most of it goes to rental of court time. The fees are from \$50 for a clinic to over a \$1000.00 to participate in travel leagues. The money collected goes to court time, coaches, and training of high school students to become coaches.

The club is a partnership and is presently researching becoming a non-profit organization. There are 4 directors, a steering committee of 8 people and 50 coaches on staff. The steering committee are volunteers and the coaches are paid. In the Junior Volleyball league the coaches are paid \$15 to \$20 an hour. They are also developing a program where they are training older high school athletes to become coaches at \$10 to \$15 an hour depending on the ages. The travel league pays between \$500 and \$2000 a coach depending on the travel schedule and practice. There are 340 participants in the junior volleyball league.

Discussion was held on if the Parks and Recreation Department held a volleyball program. There used to be a feeder program but gym time was not available so the program was dropped.

Ms. Wordell stated the need is for a facility to have more courts to have games and tournaments.

Aurora Raptors Softball - Scott Aldredge representing the Aurora Raptors girl's fast pitch softball organization. They started back in 1996 and for about 8 to 10 years they had about 4 teams between the ages of 10-18. About 4 years ago they merged the fast pitch girl's efforts and took over the girl's fast pitch travel league and now have 9 teams in the same age group. They have between 100 to 110 girls every year that range between 8-18 years old that play fast pitch softball at a travel level. They have 4 board members that help manage and coordinate the organization. They keep their fees low so everyone has a chance to play.

Mr. Aldredge stated the league they belong to is the Cuyahoga Valley league that has teams from Stow, Solon, Twinsburg, West Geauga, and other areas in Portage County they play in. They have two divisions to allow for various competitive levels. The A division is more true travel and play in some tournaments. The B division is more developmental to learn about the skills of fast pitch.

They would like to do more to increase the playability by putting training effort in off-season to be able to compete with the surrounding communities that have facilities. They play from May through July, and the Ohio Athletic Association mandates that if a girl is playing in high school ball you can't play on any travel team or a tournament team after July 31st.

Mr. Aldredge stated in their organization all the state and national tournaments are held the third and fourth week of July because they have to be done prior to August 1. It is a short window and they do cross over a lot with baseball with the same issues. Their fees are \$115 dollars per player, which covers the uniform and umpire fees and basic equipment. They play in local tournaments about 2 per age group, with tournaments fees paid by sponsors. They rent a facility off Valley View Rd. called the Hilltoper Gym in the winter months and Valley Christian School to conduct pitching clinics. Their expenses are about \$3,500 for indoor rental facilities for about 30 hours a week for about three months.

Using lighted fields have helped take the stress off playing on single fields in short periods of time but as they get more participants extra playing and practice time is needed by having more fields or lighted fields and or complex.

Mr. Aldredge stated one change could probably impact a lot of others such as having a soccer complex would take stress of baseball fields during spring and fall.

Discussion was held on the costs of the rentals that all these organizations pay would help offset the expenses of a facility if built.

Discussion was held on utilizing the lighted fields, restroom and concession area for more than one sport at different times of the year.

Aurora Historical Society – John Kudley Jr. stated he is Vice President of the Aurora Historical Society and the chairperson of the Landmark Commission and both of these are concerned about historic properties. At the moment the Historical Society uses two of the historical structures, the Margaret Harmon house and the Ray Harmon house where there are historical items stored, due to not enough space in the museum to display everything. The Margaret Harmon house and land has been considered for a working farm or similar to a Hale Homestead.

Mr. Kudley stated from the Landmark Commission standpoint those two houses are historical landmarks, not the property but the structures, but the historical significance of the structure depends on what happens to the properties around them.

The Historical Society is interested in keeping those two properties maintained for passive recreation that would fit in the nature of the historic buildings themselves such as the community gardens being considered. The Ray Harmon property is more conducive to athletic complex type facilities. The Landmark Commission is going to seek to put \$24,500 in the budget for a study to be done on the two historic buildings, Margaret Harmon property and Ray Harmon property. The buildings are beginning to deteriorate and they want an understanding of what conditions the buildings are in and what has to be done to maintain them the way they are at this time and not let them further deteriorate. The study will also explain what could happen and what would it cost to develop them in something bigger than what they are now.

Mr. Kudley stated historically there is a concern about the buildings and the use of the property on those two sites specifically. We are looking for green space to put athletic facilities in as a committee but historically we want to maintain some of the green space to preserve the historic nature of the buildings we have on those two sites. Mr. Kudley as a representative of the Historical Society wanted to remind everyone on the Committee as a group not everyone that is interested in Parks and Recreation is interested in just recreation. There is a segment of our community that is also in the preservation historically and conservation wise.

Mr. Kraus stated this trend was started before this committee was established. The more agricultural, historical, passive areas would be Margaret Harmon and Ray Harmon properties because they were primarily historical. The Hartman property was more for athletic. We started to move forward with a basic concept plan developed and when it reached the Planning Commission it was sent back until we review the Parks and Recreation Master Plan. Mr. Kraus stated there is a drawing of the basic concepts of what could be done with that area if this is what this Committee determines.

Mr. Kraus stated the next meeting will be on January 14, 2010 which we will be discussing possible uses for the properties.

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Mr. Kudley stated after listening to this evening's presentations and the amount of money that is spend by parents and organizations on the programs it would be easy for the committee to sit back and think we need to design something that is going to meet the needs of everyone. The last time we tried to put a recreation center on the ballot there was a huge price tag due to trying to have everything at one time. Kudley stated as a group we might have to take a look to see if the community is willing to support that or do we need to scale down to meet the essential needs with the idea it can be expanded in the future.

Mr. Kraus stated we are asking for money to be allocated in the budget for design studies for a four season boat house at Sunny Lake, a concession stand on the ball field side, an amphitheatre, a varsity softball field at Kiwanis Moore Park. Also some money to hire a consulting firm to assist with a plan on the recreation center.

ADJOURNMENT:

Mr. Kovach moved to adjourn: Mr. Conces seconded and the meeting adjourned at 8:35pm

Mr. Kraus – Chairman

Colleen Martin – Secretary – Pro Tem