

PARKS, RECREATION & BEACHES ADVISORY BOARD MINUTES
City of Fort Lauderdale
100 North Andrews Avenue
8th Floor Conference Room
Wednesday, July 28, 2004

<u>BOARD MEMBERS</u>	<u>ABSENT/PRESENT</u>	Cumulative from 10/02/03	
		<u>P</u>	<u>A</u>
John Rude, Chair	P	8	0
John Melnicoff, Vice Chair	P	7	1
Julie Cameron	A	5	3
Elizabeth Hays	P	7	1
Robert Hoysgaard	P	6	2
Jim LaBate	P	1	0
Joann Medalie (7:40)	P	7	1
Robert Missal	A	3	5
Timothy Nast	A	5	3
Michael Natale	A	6	2
Victoria Pristo-Revier	A	3	5
Joe Shover	P	8	0
Shirley Small	A	5	3
Andrew DeGraffenreidt, Sr.	P	5	1

Guests

Rene Quinn, Riverwalk Trust
Patsy Mennuti, Riverwalk Trust
Scott Strawbridge, Riverwalk Trust
Bob Beckoff, Water Taxi
Kathleen Ogden, Downtown Development Authority
Captain Steve Kinsey, Fort Lauderdale Police Department

Staff Present

Phil Thornburg, Acting Parks & Recreation Director
Steve Person, Recreation Superintendent
Suzanne Broucek, Recreation Program Supervisor
Marie Rock, Recreation Program Coordinator
Earnest Jones, Park Ranger Supervisor
Mike Fayyaz, Assistant City Engineer
Maybeth Irizarry-Binon, Administrative Assistant
Jamie Opperlee, Recording Clerk

Call to Order

Chair John Rude called the meeting to order at 7:00 p.m. Roll call was taken and all stood for the Pledge of Allegiance.

1. Welcome New Member James LaBate

Chair Rude introduced Jim LaBate, who explained that his involvement in his daughters' sports programs had prompted him to join the Board.

2. Recreation Program of the Month – Summer Camps

Mr. Person introduced Suzanne Broucek, Recreation Program Supervisor and Marie Rock, Recreation Program Coordinator to give a presentation on summer camp programs.

Ms. Broucek explained the camp programs offered this summer:

- Six week term
- Five neighborhood camps:
 - Bass
 - Warfield
 - Lauderdale Manors
 - Croissant
 - Riverside
- Teen camps:
 - STARS (Summer Technology, Arts, Recreation and Sports) camp at Mizel
 - TAG camp at Dillard
 - New River camp at new River Middle School
- Specialty Camps:
 - Tennis
 - Artwork at Dillard
 - British Soccer camp
 - Little Artists and the Wiggle-Jiggle
 - Gymnastic program

Ms. Broucek explained that over thirteen hundred children had been involved in the summer camp programs this summer. She and Ms. Rock detailed activities, services and programs at various camps. Ms. Rock noted that there had been very few field trips but activities such as a petting zoo and ceramics class had been brought to the camps.

In response to questions from Dr. Hays, Ms. Broucek explained that the enrollment was approximately the same as last year, with a waiting list for camp enrollment slots. Staff had been reduced from one hundred to eighty and there were no junior counselors. They had managed to

retain staff, which saved on training new staff. Mr. Person noted that the camps had been reduced from eight weeks to six, partly due to budget cuts but also due to the new school calendar. Mr. DeGraffenreidt confirmed that participants were selected on a first come – first served basis at sign-up.

3. Fiber Optics Update – Phil Thornburg

Mr. Thornburg introduced Mike Fayyaz, Assistant City Engineer, to explain the status of the plan.

Mr. Fayyaz explained that the technology was new when originally installed and had required frequent repairs. Eventually, the system could not be repaired and required replacement. Three years ago, several companies approached the City, promising that newer technology existed that could keep the wall functioning longer. The City had the companies install their components in sections of the wall so the City could test the individual products over the course of three months to one year. After this test period, city staff recommended one of the products. This company also offered the City an extended five-year warranty. Funding had been sought, and Mr. Fayyaz believed that sufficient private funding had been obtained. He hoped that the new fiber optic system would be installed before the end of the year.

4. “Go Riverwalk” Information Cart Proposal – Phil Thornburg

Mr. Thornburg introduced Scott Strawbridge from Riverwalk Trust to explain the “Go Riverwalk” information cart project.

Mr. Strawbridge explained that a pushcart would be converted to a staffed information booth for the distribution of information about Fort Lauderdale activities and sale of tickets. Mr. Strawbridge stated that this would generate traffic and enhance security.

Mr. Shover asked if there were any downsides to the proposal and Mr. Strawbridge answered that they had not thought of any. He noted that the cart would sell tickets and Riverwalk bricks, not junk. Dr. Hays was concerned what might happen to the contents of the cart and the cart itself after the employee left for the day. Mr. Strawbridge explained that people could still interact with the service on line or by using an electronic kiosk and the cart would be bolted down to prevent theft. Mr. Thornburg added that he had spoken with the City Attorney’s Office and they are reviewing the idea.

Quorum was obtained with the arrival of Ms. Medalie at 7:40.

Motion made by Dr. Hays, seconded by Mr. Shover, to approve the concept of the Go Riverwalk cart and ask city staff to proceed with project approval. In a voice vote, the motion passed unanimously.

5. Riverwalk Security Update – Phil Thornburg

Mr. Thornburg noted the increase in vandalism and “non-productive” behavior in the area and stated that Officer Kinsey and Ranger Supervisor Jones would describe the actions taken to combat this and discuss further suggestions for addressing the problem.

Mr. Strawbridge explained that Riverwalk had attracted new residents as well as tourists. He noted that while the area of Riverwalk had increased significantly, unfortunately, staff had been reduced and programs deleted. He pointed out that the longevity and safety of Riverwalk depended on activities and programs to keep the area busy. He felt the City was turning its back on the area and it would revert to being a ghost town again. He stated that the acting City Manager had very strong feelings about the City’s not funding any programs; he felt these should all be privately funded.

Ms. Patsy Mennuti, Riverwalk Trust, reported that several Performing Arts Center employees had felt threatened by individuals in the park and detailed incidents of vandalism in the area. Kathleen Ogden, Downtown Development Authority, explained that her organization marketed and facilitated events in the downtown area. She described a public sculpture display project that had been plagued with vandalism. She noted that it cost approximately sixty-one hundred dollars per month to maintain Huizenga Plaza alone.

Mr. Earnest Jones, Park Ranger Supervisor, agreed that positive activities displaced negative activities. He pointed out that since the Friday night Starlight Musicals series had been brought to Holiday Park, there had been a 95% decrease in negative activities. In Riverwalk, the new problem was with skateboarders and BMX bike riders. Skateboards were only prohibited by park rule, not by ordinance and the kids knew that the skateboards could not be confiscated so they would simply move when chased and return soon afterward. Supervisor Jones noted that the entire day shift of rangers had been lost due to budget cuts.

Captain Steve Kinsey, Fort Lauderdale Police Department, stated that juveniles were the biggest problem; even if they were arrested for vandalism, they were taken home to their parents, not to an intake facility, and they would return to the street in an hour. He suggested the city be petitioned to create an ordinance against skateboarding in the park. Unfortunately, due to budget cuts, the entire Community Police Division was gone; they had previously been responsible for these quality of life issues.

Ms. Medalie pointed out that many people had a lot at stake if Riverwalk deteriorated. She wondered if the area developers and residents should get together to help provide security. Chair Rude remembered that during the Holiday Park cleanup the neighbors had gotten together and become the “eyes and ears” for the police to identify people who caused problems in the area. He asked Mr. Strawbridge to get his group together to perform the same function.

Mr. Strawbridge stated that hopefully there would be an ordinance soon to ban skateboarding in Riverwalk. He wondered if it was the role of a civic association to perform law enforcement. He thought they could help program the park and do other things that would help displace crime. He felt that since the City owned the park, they needed to “step up to the plate.”

Chair Rude noted that after activities were over, neighbors needed to keep watch over their own neighborhoods, as his did in Holiday Park. He felt some of the new resident near Riverwalk probably possessed “the highest technology cameras that money can buy”, and could provide videotape to aid the police in enforcement.

Dr. Hays noted that the parks bond issue was entirely for new things; no money was budgeted for maintenance. She felt they needed to realize that taxes would need to be raised in order to properly fund the needs of Parks and Recreation, the Police Department and other community needs. She thought there were some commissioners who would favor lowering the millege rate again and thought they should attend budget meetings in August to witness what was being cut.

Mr. Thornburg noted that from a staff of twelve maintenance people at Riverwalk, they were now down to eight. He thought it might be advisable to develop a subcommittee of the Riverwalk Trust group of property owners and their security personnel to get together with the police to brainstorm ways they could work together to solve the security problems.

6. City Parks Forum Community Engagement – Phil Thornburg

Mr. Thornburg stated that the attached article was for their reading enjoyment and is the next installment in the series provided at the previous month’s meeting.

7. Department Budget Update – Phil Thornburg

Mr. Thornburg informed the Board of several budget changes for Parks and Recreation for next year. Two more park ranger positions would be lost; the City’s special events coordinator position and park manager position at Snyder Park would both be eliminated; acting City Manager Alan Silva had directed them to seek private promoters for all special events. They had also been asked to raise all user fees by 15% to bring in an additional \$450,000 in revenue. He feared this increase might price some programs out of the market.

A few nice things had been added to next year’s budget: the master plan gave them \$119,000 and four positions that had been lost last year were being brought back. He encouraged the Board to contact the City Commission, the Mayor, and the new City Manager during the budget process if they had concerns.

Mr. Shover read his letter to Commissioner Hutchinson dated July 21, 2004, expressing his disappointment with the loss of services in Fort Lauderdale and informing her that he was willing to pay additional taxes to ensure funding for those services.

Mr. Hoysgaard was extremely concerned about the loss of the Snyder Park Manager position; he wondered how the park could be run without a manager. Mr. Thornburg added that this park was a seven-day operation with a lake and dog park that required seven-day management. Mr. Hoysgaard felt city management was forcing the decay of the City. Mr. Melnicoff thought that the long-term employees were being pushed out by the City in order to save money in the short term.

Dr. Hays noted that everyone from the Police and Fire Departments had attended the budget meetings last year but no one had spoken for Parks and Recreation. In order to affect the budget for next year, she suggested writing to commissioners and attending budget hearings to speak for Parks and Recreation. She felt the City Commission's vote to reduce the millage rate last year was unconscionable. If they wanted an increase in services, they must be willing to pay for them, as Mr. Shover had expressed to Commissioner Hutchinson.

Chair Rude asked if Mr. Thornburg had any news about the Hyde Park site. Mr. Thornburg stated that there had been discussion, but no vote, concerning the land swap at the last commission meeting. Dr. Hays felt the important thing was that the beach property was off the table because that deal was too much in favor of the developers.

Other Items of Interest

Ms. Medalie complimented Mr. Thornburg on the appearance of the East side of A1A; Mr. Thornburg informed her that they were using new pressure washing equipment. He also noted that the City was responsible for the east side and businesses for the west side, so some pressure should be put on the business owners to keep their side as clean as the City was keeping its side.

Dr. Hays had sent email to the commissioners and had asked Ms. Irizarry-Binon to provide them each with copies of the "Bark Park" article since this was seen as a national model for dog parks. Dr. Hays then announced that Fort Lauderdale had been named the number two "animal friendly city" in the United States by Animal Wellness magazine.

Dr. Hays had also told the commissioners in her email that the City should send condolences to the family or trust of Richard Block, who had recently died. She asked Ms. Irizarry-Binon to determine what progress had been made in Cancer Survivor Plaza. Mr. Thornburg noted that they had been dealing with Mr. Block on the project. The design he approved had proven to cost twice what they intended to spend and they were in the process of working with him to scale back the design and find additional funding at the time of Mr. Block's death. The plan now is to wait a month or two and the process would continue.

Dr. Hays stated that she thought there would be a rededication ceremony for the return of the plane to Holiday Park. Ms. Irizarry-Binon announced that there was a ceremony and parade tentatively scheduled on Veteran's day, November 11.

Mr. Hoysgaard wanted to be sure the commissioners received copies of the dog park article and asked that the acting City Manager and new City Manager receive copies as well. He then read a portion of an article concerning "high performance boards" and suggested the Parks and Recreation board must take the initiative; if need be, they should meet in August. Regarding Mr. Silva's cutting of the Jazz Brunch program, Mr. Hoysgaard felt that Mr. Silva did not believe the City belonged in the business of events.

Approval of Minutes (Deferred due to lack of a quorum earlier)

Motion made by Mr. Shover, seconded by Mr. Hoysgaard, to approve the minutes of the June 23, 2004 meeting. In a voice vote, the motion passed unanimously.

There being no further business before the Board, the meeting was adjourned at 8:55 p.m.

Handouts

Photographic rendering of Riverwalk "Go Riverwalk" information booth pushcart

Copy of Mr. Shover's letter to Commissioner Hutchinson dated July 21, 2004

Copy of "Playgrounds for Pups" article regarding the dog park