



RECREATION COMMISSION WORKSHOP

AUGUST 23, 2023

OFFICIAL MINUTES

ALPHARETTA CITY HALL
COMMUNITY ROOM | 2 PARK PLAZA | 5:30 PM

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I. CALL TO ORDER

- ❖ Chairman Mitchell called the meeting to order at 5:30 p.m.

II. ROLL CALL

- **Recreation Commission Members - Present**
 - Dennis Mitchell (Chairman)
 - Jit Saha (Vice Chair)
 - John Norton
 - Karla Peidrahita
 - Cheryl Rand
 - Brad Bowers
- **Recreation Commission Members – Absent**
 - Jeremy Scott
 - Derek Kaighin
 - Shuntel Beach
- **Staff**
 - Kurt Kirby – Project Manager, Recreation, Parks & Cultural Services
 - Christine Young – Recreation Services Manager, Recreation, Parks & Cultural Services
 - Amber O'Dwyer – Administrative Office Coordinator, Recreation, Parks & Cultural Services

III. WORKSHOP ITEMS

a. Trail Counter Program Update

- Kirk Kirby, Project Manager for the Department of Recreation, Parks & Cultural Services presented the item.
- One of the biggest question as it relates to the Big Creek Greenway is, "How many people use the trail?"

- Staff has explored various ways throughout the years to determine the number of trail users.
- The City of Roswell has implemented TRAFx counters that proved to be successful, and Alpharetta chose to invest in two units to test the product. The TRAFx test counters offered promising results and the city has now invested in six total counters installed and activated across various park's trails.
- The placement of the counters must be thoroughly considered to ensure accurate counts. For example, placing the counter at easy trail access points could skew the data as the total count would incorporate those who quickly hop on and off the trail thereby not truly utilizing the trail. That said, many are installed along mile markers but are mobile, and can be repositioned as needed. To add, the counters are mounted and do not include a rubber strip that crosses the trail and could result in a safety issue.
- At this time, staff simply wishes to inform the Commission on the possible data options that the counters deliver ranging from counts by hour, to days of the week or monthly comparisons.
- The program is still in its infancy, but staff hopes the data can be helpful in maintenance and repair decisions as the trails age.

RECREATION COMMISSION DISCUSSION:

RE: Trail Counter Program

- Q What is the purpose of collecting the user volume if we plan to maintain the trails anyway? Are not the main weathering materials, rain, fallen trees, etc. and not usage? (Bowers)
- A The trail counter could help prioritize trail repairs. For example, perhaps one trail is experiencing erosion issues and, if the data shows the trail is a highly used trail, such a trail's restoration would be prioritized over others with lesser traffic.
- The counters could also be used to provide crucial documentation illustrating the community impact of a trail or park initiative when questions are raised regarding funding such initiatives. (Kirby)
- Q Do (or could) the counters include cameras that could help in terms of public safety of trail users? As a female, knowing one trail is more highly trafficked than another could add an element of safety, but it would be comforting to know cameras are also along the trails. (Piedrahita)
- A The counters do not have the option to include cameras intended for public safety. However, the data the counters could provide, can bring awareness to the Public Safety Department of the grand number of trail users and may help determine where cameras could be positioned and support funding initiatives for cameras along trails.
- Q Are there any collaborative funding initiatives to help cover costs of such projects? (Piedrahita, Rand)
- A While not necessarily for this project, staff does try and find ways to collaborate on initiatives when possible.

- Q Vice Chair Saha stated he would have preferred the funding be used to install cameras versus counters. That said, when considering where to put the cameras, how would that best be determined? Would it be wiser to place them in high traffic areas or lower?
- A While staff's focus was not on trail cameras at this time, the questions posed by the Commission regarding trail cameras are valid and perhaps security cameras could be explored down the road. (Kirby)
- Q How long is the Big Creek Greenway? (Mitchell)
- A Nine miles. (Kirby)
- C Commissioner Norton stated the sheer volume produced by the counters warrants Public Safety taking a look at installing cameras along the trails. Additionally, cameras could help park staff monitor where maintenance problem exists as well.
- C Vice Chair Saha stated perhaps Public Safety could be invited to attend a Recreation Commission workshop to explore and make them aware of safety initiatives in the parks.

b. ARPCS Scholarship Program

- Christine Young, Recreation Services Manager for the Department of Recreation, Parks & Cultural Services presented the item.
- Alpharetta has a program in place, the ARPCS Scholarship Program, in which low-income families who meet certain qualifications may receive subsidized funding for children to participate in recreational programs.
- The current program was reviewed by staff, and it was determined that much of the documentation provided to the city was duplicitous to that required by Fulton County Schools (FCS). Applicants are currently providing documentation once to the school system to meet free-lunch requirements and then again to Alpharetta for acceptance into the ARPCS Scholarship Program.
- From that realization, staff wishes to streamline the current process.
 1. If the applicant qualified for the free-lunch program via FCS, then the applicant would only need to show the SNAP card, proof of Alpharetta residency, and a driver's license.
 2. This would not negate the current process, however, if the applicant is not participating in the free-lunch program. When not, all documentation currently required must be submitted.
- Additionally, staff will move away from the tiered program based on percentage to a flat fund of \$1,000 per child.
- With minimal applicants, there is currently no cap for the program.

RECREATION COMMISSION DISCUSSION:

RE: ARPCS Scholarship Program

- Q Specifically, how will funding be determined and expended? (Mitchell)

- A Applicants will receive \$1,000 per registrant. For those who sign-up late resulting in a pro-rated cos) for a class or camp (i.e., a class is \$1,000, the child signs up two days late, total pro-rated expense is \$800), staff would reach out to the applicant and inform them of the outstanding fund balance and request it be expended or released back to the scholarship funding pool. Currently, there is not a specific line item in the budget to fund the program. (Young)
- Q With no cap, how many would be eligible? Indefinite? (Bowers)
- A So few apply and qualify, staff is not concerned about an abundance of qualified applicants. (Young)
- Q So we are moving away from the tiered program to a flat rate? (Rand)
- A Yes. (Young)
- Q What if the program explodes from 8 applicants to 200 in a matter of years? (Mitchell)
- A We've never had a limit (as we've never had many applicants), but what I'm hearing is that the Commission would like to have a cap in participants and or in our available funding? (Young)
- C There should be a limit and ability to get "free money" should be difficult. (Bowers)
- C Having a set fund that once expended, is expended for the year, is a good idea. To lessen the risk of the opportunity of "free money" snowballing among the public. It may just be a good idea to better define the program. (Mitchell)
- Q What of private school financial assistance programs? (Piedrahita)
- A We are unsure of the process for subsidiary funding among private schools. They may not vet or even have a vetting process. (Young)
- Q Would we vote on a complete transition to the new program? (Mitchell)
- A We would have a hybrid process between the current qualification process and the proposed.
1. Students who can present a SNAP card or proof of participation in the free-lunch program can void the additional documentation currently required (with the exception of the driver's license and proof of Alpharetta residency).
 2. Students not participating in such a school program, must submit all documentation currently requested for all participants. (Young)
- Q With the hybrid program, we would still move away from a percentage/tiered system to a flat rate? (Rand)
- A Yes, flat rate regardless of application process. (Young)
- Q Is there any data that shows program attendance records for those who need not worry about paying for the program given the financial assistance? (Piedrahita)
- A The revisions being proposed to the Commission would require (and document) that the participant must maintain a 75% attendance record. (Young)
- Q Is the scholarship program in the activity guide? Online? (Mitchell)
- A It is referenced in the guide. Unsure if it is still online. (Young)

- C Chairman Mitchell stated he believed the program should be better defined before approved.
- C Commissioner Norton noted the scholarship program is only intended for classes and camps, not athletic associations.
- A Keep in mind, depending on the class, the \$1,000 limit could be expended quickly. (Young)
- Q Is the \$1,000 limit per household or per child? (Saha)
- A Per child. (Young)
- C Commissioner Bowers stated the SNAP program seems easy to achieve from federal regulations. The Alpharetta scholarship should be harder to attain.
- C Both the cities of Roswell and Johns Creek use this method and through our research, the process required to qualify for SNAP eligibility is rigorous. (Young)
- Q Based on the SNAP eligibility method, how many kids apply and are accepted into the financial assistance programs offered by Roswell and Johns Creek? (Norton)
- A We are unsure, but we could reach out to obtain numbers. (Young)
- C Commissioner Norton believed the funding made availability should be based off of the need shown in the other cities.
- C The other cities are slightly larger so that may not be the best method. (Commissioners and Staff)
- Q What documentation must be provided for ARPCS Scholarship eligibility? (Saha)
- A Proof of residency, a driver's license, and SNAP program approval. SNAP cards include the name of the student so this should help ensure that a card is not easily passed to another. Staff does the best they can to vet and mitigate fraud. (Young)
- Q If someone drops off the eligibility list, would staff then cycle back to the next eligible child in the application process that was denied? (Saha)
- A Yes. (Young)
- C Commissioner Rand reminded that the athletic organizations have their own financial assistance programs.
- C To confirm, the Commission would like to for staff to: (Young)
- Incorporate a registration date for camps.
 - Obtain data from Johns Creek and Roswell as to how many use the program.
 - Include a participation cap between 20-25 applicants (avoiding a hard cut off given families with multiple children)
- Q Should we workshop this item before seeking approval? (Kirby)
- A Resounding yes. (Commission)

IV. ITEMS FROM COMMISSION MEMBERS

- Q Could more prominent signage be displayed regarding the electronic fence at Wills Park as kids are reaching through the fence to pet the goats posing a safety issue? (Saha)

A We can reach out to Matt Casey on the issue. (Kirby)

V. ADJOURNMENT

❖ *Chairman Mitchell adjourned the meeting at 6:29 p.m.*

Respectfully submitted,

A handwritten signature in blue ink that reads "Amber O'Dwyer". The signature is written in a cursive, flowing style.

Amber O'Dwyer

Administrative Office Coordinator