

Flathead County Weed/Parks/Recreation
MINUTES
Board of Directors
Meeting Date: March 7, 2011

Members of the Board in attendance:

James Buechle, Clyde Fisher, Elise Robocker, Ray Sanders, Jim Watson

Members of the Board not in attendance:

There was no one absent.

Also in attendance:

Jed Fisher, Superintendent; Gordon Jewett, Assistant Superintendent; and Michele Haarr, Clerk

Others Present:

Jennifer Drew – Lakeside Parks Advisory Committee

Skip Gilmore – Bigfork Advisory Committee

Clifford Kipp – Montana Conservation Corps

Jerry Murphy – Sliter Park

Paul Mutascio – Sliter Park

Tamara Tanberg – Lakeside Parks Advisory Committee

Andy Young – Foys/Herron Advisory Committee

Call to Order

A regular meeting of the Board of Directors, Flathead County Weed, Parks & Recreation, was held in the conference room at 311 FFA Drive, Kalispell, Montana, on March 7, 2011. The meeting convened at 8:30 A.M., Chairman Sanders presiding.

Approval of Minutes

Minutes of the February 2 and February 7, 2011 meetings of the Flathead County Weed, Parks & Recreation Board of Directors were distributed to the members of the Board and approved as printed.

Public Comment

There was no public comment.

Dog Park – Ray Sanders

Chairman Ray Sanders stated he recently visited Hawaii where there is a similar concern regarding loose dogs. When the lifeguards come on duty, the dogs disappear. Chairman Sanders indicated there are 2 – 3 dog parks where the land is furnished and a kennel club manages the park, providing insurance, fencing & maintenance. By and large, it is working.

Superintendent Fisher reported that the office still receives telephone calls regarding loose dogs at parks. Jim Watson reported that at Herron Park it is the same people who are regular in taking their dogs to the park. They go deep into the park to exercise and let their dog(s) exercise. Mr. Watson commented that it is a different dynamic at dog parks, where smaller dogs prevail and owners visit.

Andy Young reported that the Herron/Foys Advisory Committee is split over a potential dog park; therefore no further action was taken. It was generally agreed that it would take too much time for Mr. Jewett to police as he has responsibility for all County parks. With the new signing it is hard to plead ignorance. Any change in the fees would apply to all County parks and require the Board's and Commissioner's approval. It was commented that the Forest Service in Jewel Basin has a \$125 penalty, with the argument that it provides for wildlife security.

Elise Robocker made a motion to increase the fine for dog infractions to \$125 per occurrence.

Jim Buechle seconded the motion.

There being no discussion, and all in favor ~ the motion was carried.

Annual Chemical Bid

Jed Fisher reported that the annual chemical bid exceeds 50K and therefore required Board approval. The current estimate is 90 – 92K, which is very close to prior years.

Jim Buechle made a motion to approve the annual chemical estimate to go to bid.

Clyde Fisher seconded the motion.

There being no discussion, and all in favor ~ the motion was carried.

Sliter Park

Jed Fisher reported that there is a lease renewal proposal for this park. Ongoing maintenance includes raking, mowing, weed eating, irrigation, restroom maintenance, and insurance, with an annual estimate of 254 hours and costs from 4-7K. The Sheriff's office does not like to work at Sliter, particularly during holidays; however, over the years vandalism has diminished. Assistant Superintendent Gordon Jewett stated that the park gets hit hard over the July 4th holiday. It will generally take 1 – 2 men a day to clean up even with the help of the Bigfork business group. Campers are on site during festivals.

The entry has been greatly improved and the Riverbend Concert Association helps with the costs. Many feel that this park is as important to Bigfork as Volunteer Park is to Lakeside.

Paul Mutascio introduced himself as the President of The Community Foundation For A Better Bigfork, a 501c3. Mr. Mutascio indicated that people see Sliter as more of a regional park because of the draw and use. The group contributes \$1,000 per year to help offset costs. This year there has been approximately 40K in private contributions to provide for improvements for the park entry, and to maintain the stage area and vegetation surrounding it.

Mr. Mutascio further stated that the Better Bigfork group also helps maintain the park and has posted "No Overnight Camping" signing, and has installed and maintains doggie pots/stations and a "No Dogs" sign on the River Trail. The group would be happy to refurbish the sign to include increased dog fines. Mutascio indicated that the park use has increased over the years and has the only public bathroom in downtown Bigfork. Mr. Mutascio asked the Board to approve a 5 year lease extension.

Jerry Murphy agreed that people think of Sliter as a regional park. The bathroom can be an issue at times but the park is the heart of the community. There have been as many as 150 people participating in the refurbished entry effort.

The importance of communication between PacifiCorp and Flathead County Parks & Recreation Department was discussed. The Parks & Recreation Department should be notified of any park maintenance, including logging. Superintendent Fisher was directed to the County Attorney to review this. Fisher stated that the County assumes full responsibility for lawsuits and/or any legal action, neither of which has occurred to date. Depending on the year, donations run approximately 2K, with 4K being best-case. Ray Sanders suggested a meeting with the caretaker to open up dialogue. It was noted that the community and PacifiCorp do not like camping.

Jim Watson suggested that terms and conditions outside of the boiler plate contract could be covered in a Memorandum of Understanding.

Clyde Fisher made a motion to approve a lease renewal for Sliter Park in Bigfork, with the addition of language that will open the line of communication between the Lessor and the Lessee.

James Buechle seconded the motion.

There being no discussion, and all in favor ~ the motion was carried.

Montana Conservation Corps/Foys To Blacktail Trails 2011 Outlook

Clifford Kipp, Regional Supervisor for Montana Conservation Corps stated that they have come in each year for the past 4 years. Mr. Kipp also stated that he is invested in the Foys To Blacktail Trails group as a Board member, but was here today on behalf of MCC.

Kipp commented that the partnership with the County is strong in construction, outreach & maintenance, including how to provide for maintenance in years to come. Volunteer hours totaled 415 hours over 4 seasons, not including any FTBT hours. Kipp wanted to allay any Board concerns regarding ongoing maintenance. The Recreational Trails Program offers a very good grant for continued maintenance and continued funding is anticipated; however there is a movement in Washington D.C. to eliminate all outdoor programs such as RTP and LWCF.

Mr. Kipp presented a Service Order between the MCC and Flathead County – **see Attachment “A”**. Kipp would like to see the Service Order in place by the next Board meeting in order to begin construction with local crews by April 11th. In addition, Kipp presented a standard MOU allowing MCC to hold Volunteer Days at Herron Park – **see Attachment “B”**. This document is a boiler plate agreement and similar to previous years, with Volunteers covered under MCC insurance. April 11th is National Volunteer Week and includes those contributing community service hours, and international baccalaureate students. National Trails Day is June 4th and National Public Lands Day is in mid-September. This season there will be 1.5 miles of new trails added to the new addition to Herron Park.

Jim Buechle made a motion to approve the following documents between the Montana Conservation Corps and Flathead County Parks and Recreation 1) Service Order, Project Code: 11N523 and 11N523Y for the period from April 11, 2011 to October 30, 2011; and 2) Memorandum of Understanding for the period from April 11, 2011, through December 31, 2012.

Elise Robocker seconded the motion.

There being no discussion, and all in favor ~ the motion was carried.

Bigfork Advisory Report

Skip Gilmore stated that the advisory group has a meeting scheduled on April 20th, with nothing new to report at this time.

Foys/Herron Advisory Report

Andy Young reported that the advisory committee was in favor of the recent policy allowing food service providers for scheduled park events. FCTA meets tonight and will continue discussion regarding hang tags. In addition, the group is discussing events where there is more than one user group at the same time.

Mr. Young thanked the Board for the groomed ski trails and questioned whether the gate to the sled hill was still open. Assistant Superintendent Gordon Jewett indicated that the area is being observed several times per week to see that the ground remains solid. The gate has been shut twice during the season to avoid rough up of the soil.

Assistant Superintendent Gordon Jewett reported that the footpath at Foys Lake beach access will be improved, with the help of FVCC and/or MCC. Mr. Young requested that the parking area have barriers installed to eliminate vehicles damaging the fence.

Jim Watson questioned the plan to address dying Ponderosas. Assistant Superintendent Jewett reported that the trees at this location have been evaluated and will be evaluated this season.

Lakeside Advisory Report

Tamara Tanberg submitted appointment forms for the Advisory Committee. They have lost one member and a notice will need to be published eliciting new members.

Jennifer Drew thanked the Board for their support of the tennis courts. There is a fundraiser coming up on June 11th from 11am to 3pm. In addition, the USTA will be promoting a membership drive and is offering a free backpack valued at \$30 or a tennis racket valued at \$20 for a \$19 fee. Ms. Drew stated that Lakeside is the only court with quick-start lines which allows multiple teams to play at a given time, instead of just 2 players.

In addition, there was discussion regarding relocating the playground equipment to an area that has a proper fall zone. Also in the season's work plan is placement of several large rocks for path control, which will require removal of 10 or more trees.

Middle Forks Parks Advisory Report

There was no report from the Middle Forks Parks Advisory Committee.

Other Business

Personnel Change, Weed Department – Superintendent Fisher reported that Bruce Schomer has submitted his resignation. There is discussion about filling the position in-house, or creating two 4.5 month positions rather than one 9 month position. More people are needed out in the field to

keep up with weed spraying, in particular yellow flag iris and tansy ragwort. The starting pay rate is \$12.80 per hour, with Mr. Schomer's cap out at \$15.50 - \$16.00 per hour.

Gymnasium Viability – Superintendent Fisher asked the Board to clarify its position relative to the purchase or construction of a gymnasium building, which he believes would be a benefit to the citizens and the County. The goal is to provide recreational programs consistent with demand and to create a cash-flow for sustainability. Fisher further stated that this was not a power trip but rather an attempt to create a sustainable cash flow in an area that there is a need. Several people are interested in serving on a steering committee to investigate the possibilities and provide guidance for direction of the proposed project. In addition, the Commissioner's have expressed their support of a feasibility study.

Fisher acknowledged and expressed his regret about the division among the Board members for this project. He clarified that it was not his intent to horde funds in the cash-in-lieu account, but rather to have funds available for department needs over and above the budget, which has remained the same since 1997. Fisher would want to retain some money in the bank. He would like a unified Board to go to the Commissioners and is looking for more support.

Elise Robocker stated that she comes from a different perspective and feels the money is better spent elsewhere, and she would need to be convinced of its viability with hard facts. Similarly, Jim Watson does not see a gym making money and stated that there is a lot more to it than buying a building and keeping the light on. Mr. Watson would like to see a business plan that advocates the project prior to any further consideration. Chairman Ray Sanders commented that everyone at the table is business oriented and appreciates the importance of good business practices with general agreement that further research and investigation is in order. Mr. Sanders expressed his opinion that there is no better time to proceed with this than right now and if it can be shown that it will work, he is all for it. Jim Buechle said while the feasibility study is one thing, he feels a good opportunity was missed a few years ago when there was discussion regarding the purchase of the neighboring Stillwater Christian School. A gym would keep kids off the streets and have some potential to be paid back.

Elise Robocker questioned kids paying fees and stated that we don't know how many will pay for playing a sport. There are always a lot more costs than anticipated. Ms. Robocker reiterated that she would like to see guaranteed numbers of support with some potential above & beyond break even. Robocker wants to know how many will come and use this facility – for sure. She stated that this is a big investment with so many vacant buildings right now.

Jim Buechle made a motion to order a feasibility study and business plan for a gymnasium. Clyde Fisher seconded the motion. There being no further discussion, and all in favor ~ the motion was carried.

Non-Profit Park Usage – Superintendent Jed Fisher reminded the Board that they had previously voted to allow non-profit groups to use the parks free of charge, however, the County still has hard costs involved in park maintenance resulting in a negative cash flow for these events. He questioned whether we went to continue with this practice or try to negotiate some donation or in-kind participation. A review of the past minutes was requested to clarify prior intent. Jim Buechle stated that user fees should be mandatory.

Park Ordinances - Assistant Superintendent Gordon Jewett is reviewing the Park Ordinances for modifications and will bring it back to the Board for approval.

Church Slough – There has been was nothing new to report since early January, when the Plaintiff suggested making the launch smaller, which is impossible due to ADA standards.

Adjournment

The time and place of the next regular meeting is Monday, April 4, 2011 in the conference room at 311 FFA Drive, Kalispell, Montana, and the March 7, 2011 meeting was adjourned at 11:10 A.M.