

RAMSEY COUNTY PARKS AND RECREATION COMMISSION

MINUTES

November 12, 2014

PARKS AND RECREATION DEPARTMENT

The meeting of the Ramsey County Parks and Recreation Commission was called to order by Chair Gale Pederson at 6:00 p.m., at Ramsey County's Highland Arena in St. Paul, Minnesota.

Members Present: Gale Pederson, Jack Ditmore, Deb Falkowski, Rich Straumann, Candy Petersen,

Members Absent: Phil Jenni, Bryan Shirley, Brian Tempas and Metric Giles,

Staff Present: Jon Oyanagi, Ryan O'Connor and Kara Coustry

APPROVAL OF AGENDA

Candy Petersen moved, seconded by Rich Straumann, that the agenda of the Parks and Recreation Commission be approved as emailed. Motion carried unanimously.

APPROVAL OF MINUTES

Rich Straumann moved, seconded by Candy Petersen, that the minutes of October 8, 2014 be approved. Motion carried unanimously.

RYAN O'CONNOR – REDUCING CONCENTRATED AREAS OF POVERTY AND INCREASING ECONOMIC PROSPERITY

Ryan O'Connor works in the Ramsey County Manager's Office as the Director of Policy Analysis and Planning. Below is a summary of Ryan's PowerPoint on the subject of economic prosperity and concentrated poverty.

Prosperity means opportunity for everyone in employment, education, housing, investment and capacity. For economic prosperity work to be successful, it must incorporate regional, county, city and neighborhood levels of analysis and planned actions using complimentary visions and collaborative efforts. A greater prosperity spread across assets of people, capital and land, creates greater resiliency and potential for future growth. Future economic prosperity requires an educated, trained and available workforce.

A highly educated workforce builds a sustainable, resilient economy and presents growth opportunities for businesses. Ramsey County will remain significantly more racially diverse than the region, meaning that ongoing, race-based disparities will have a greater impact. Ramsey County has the greatest math and reading deficiency in the region, in addition to the lowest percent of High School Graduates or higher. Less than half (44%) of Ramsey County third-graders (i.e. future workers) read at levels deemed proficient by state tests.

Available land is another key prosperity factor and a predictor of future development and economic growth, for which Ramsey County is comprised of the fewest acres at only 5.5% of the total land area in the region, with only 9% of that land undeveloped. Being a State Capital Community, we have higher proportions of institutional (non-taxable) land use, and when combined with little undeveloped land and a significantly

higher proportion of residential land use, every commercial and industrial development and redevelopment opportunity is significant.

Ramsey County has the highest proportion of census tracts in the region identified as Concentrated Areas of Financial Poverty. The greatest human capital and economic development growth potential exists within concentrated areas of poverty as they are the most underutilized and undervalued areas in the region. A map overlay of concentrated poverty and parks reveals that geographic connections to parks vary across Ramsey County. How do we address park access barriers both perceived and actual?

Ryan provided a handout that summarized 11 action steps for the County to enhance prosperity as a service provider, procurer of goods and services and as an employer. Each step is listed below.

As a major service provider:

- Strengthen ties between Workforce, Infrastructure and Economic Development
- Improve the continuum of services available to Ramsey County's youth and their families
- Develop and execute a Strategic Facilities Implementation Plan
- Dedicate planning and strategic staff support to the Criminal Justice Coordinating Council
- Expand resident use of job connections and construction hiring connections when seeking employment
- Develop a culture that continually evaluates how decisions will impact concentrated areas of poverty

As a major procurer of goods and services:

- Enhance small business enterprise procurement by departments when purchasing goods and/or services
- Expand employer use of job connect and construction hiring connections when seeking to hire employees

As a major employer:

- Build on the initial successes and momentum of Ramsey County's Race Equity Leadership Team
- Conduct a comprehensive review of Human Resources: hiring, promotion and retention practices and policies

In response to Jack Ditmore's question about performance measures for each of the 11 action steps, Ryan mentioned the development of an RFP to further study and identify various performance measures. Ryan offered his contact information for any future questions: ryan.oconnor@co.ramsey.mn.us or 651-266-8011.

Gale Pederson commented that we need to meld with schools, city parks and governments toward the goal of providing community connections to parks, school, education, jobs, etc. Collaboration is a great way to combine limited resources and get more out of tax dollars. Gale also mentioned the impact of youth job corps and how parks have evolved in their programming efforts to attract more diverse populations such as Hmong and Somali as well as people of all age groups. Parks does create quality of life. If we can add programming, create learning opportunities and grow interests, park participants will do better in schools, which translates into doing better in the workforce.

Jon Oyanagi agreed with Gale about collaborating with other agencies, and added that there's a delicate tax payer balance when you duplicate park services and resources. Jon mentioned trails aren't just recreation amenities, they provide connectivity, and that we have already been successful connecting non-typical park users to our facilities through trail connections and extensions. Most recently, we started a collaborative effort with the City of Maplewood to add Tujlub to Keller Regional Park. As a final note, Ramsey County is one of ten implementing agencies under the Metropolitan Council's 2040 Plan. The County Chair is encouraging Jon to drive support for the Metropolitan Council 2040 Plan despite pushback from outlying counties.

GO-APE

Jon presented Go Ape, a ropes course and zip-lining operator who would build, operate and provide a percentage of sales if Ramsey County would provide the space. Jon approached them during the National Recreation and Park Conference. They take an environmental approach by using trees, rocks and poles to construct their courses. They would build a 400 square foot building and need to secure their facility at night with fencing or gates, but otherwise, the operation would not interfere with trails or other park features because it is primarily up in the trees.

Tree top adventure courses take about 2-3 hours to maneuver, cost \$35 for kids ages 10 – 17, \$55 for adults and require minimum height of 4'7" and allow a maximum weight of 285 lbs. The children's courses take about 1-1.5 hours to maneuver, are accessible to ages 4-12, with minimal height of 3 feet and costs \$25. About 9% of Go Ape participants are underserved groups who attend free of charge through a scholarship program.

Rich Straumann thought this would be a good opportunity for people of diversity to experience this type of activity, and also expressed his interest in serving on a committee should one be formed for more research. Deb Falkowski thought it was expensive and could be exclusionary. Jack Ditmore wondered if this was the only company doing this and was concerned about a private entity, sole source contract and the liability aspect. He suggested approaching the Metropolitan Council for funding to provide this activity on our own and also encouraged Jon to reach out to Dakota County who also operates a zip-line course. Jack did think it would be a great amenity, both in regards to staff development and youth development.

Gale Pederson wondered about the track record of Go Ape, and also about other options. She encouraged asking more questions related to the legalities and liability. She also wanted to explore more in terms of scholarships. Jon agreed to look into it further, but mentioned that after 3 million visitors, there have been no incidents.

WORK PLANS

We passed out copies of the 2014 Parks and Recreation Commission Work Plans for the group to review in preparation for December's Commission meeting discussion and development of 2015 Work Plans.

DIRECTOR'S REPORT

Aldrich's locker room addition by Hill-Murray is progressing. Manitou Ridge construction is also progressing with the establishment of an underground water tank for storage of water for the building's fire suppression system. Rice Creek Regional Trail at County Road H is moving forward. A bid will be going out in the summer and work is anticipated to start next year.

Sara Ackmann accepted the Director of Golf and Arena Operations and will start on Dec. 8, 2014. Thanks to Deb Falkowski and Rich Straumann for participating on the community interview panel. Sara comes to us from the Minneapolis Parks and Recreation Board and has 28 years of experience in Golf, Ice and winter recreation activities such as cross-country skiing, downhill skiing, snowboarding and sledding.

The City of Maplewood Parks and Recreation Commission agreed to a joint meeting which has been scheduled tentatively for February. We have shared development projects at Fish Creek, Troutbrook and the Tujlub courts at Keller Regional Park. Later next year we will also look at touring with St. Paul Parks and Recreation and the Friends of Ramsey County.

Our legislative agenda items go to the County Board in December. Jon met with Representative, Sheldon Johnson today who authored the Battle Creek Winter Recreation snow-making proposal in 2014. Items on the County's

platform include Regional Parks Operations and Maintenance funding, Mighty Ducks Funding, Emerald Ash Borer funding and Legacy funding.

All ice arenas are open for business and all golf courses are now closed. Vadnais Sports Center (VSC) dome bookings have been lacking, but ice is full. Starting in January, Vadnais Sports Center dome is booked solidly through spring.

During the fall National Recreation and Park Association Congress and Exposition in Charlotte, NC, Jon accepted our official CAPRA award for passing our most recent re-accreditation in 2014. Our next accreditation will occur in 2019.

REPORT FROM THE CHAIR AND OTHER COMMISSION MEMBERS

Rich Straumann is still working on the Ramsey County Bike and Pedestrian Master Plan. We are down to two proposals right now.

There was a request for the December Parks and Recreation Commission meeting to occur at Keller Golf Course. It was decided that members had the option of showing up at 5:00 pm for Dutch-treat, with the normal commission meeting to occur at 6:00 p.m.

ADJOURNMENT

Upon appropriate motion, the meeting was adjourned at 7:32 p.m.

Respectfully Submitted,
Kara Coustry