

**Visalia Parks & Recreation Commission  
Meeting Minutes December 17, 2013**

**1. Call Meeting to Order/Roll Call**

The Visalia Parks & Recreation Commission met in a regular meeting on Tuesday, December 17, 2013, at the City Council Chambers, Visalia, California. The meeting was called to order by Chairperson Calhoun at 5:30 pm.

**Present:** Carla Calhoun, Ben Filiponi, Shann Blue, Robert Doi, and Lesa Mann

**Guests:** Michael Kreps and Juan Guerrero

**Staff:** Vincent Elizondo, Jim Bean, Jeannie Greenwood, and Brenda Miernik

**2. Review and Approve the Minutes of the Regular Meeting, November 19, 2013.** Commissioner Calhoun called for a motion to approve the November 19, 2013 minutes. Commissioner Mann moved to approve the minutes as presented and Commissioner Doi seconded the motion.

**MOTION**

Motion passed 5-0

**3. Public Comment:** Ms. Greenwood stated she received written comments from Ms. Lorna Cheng, of the Tuesday Duplicate Bridge Group, and they would be addressed with Item No. 6. She said a copy of the correspondence has been provided to the Commissioners.

**4. Review and Approve the Annual Plaza Raceway Schedule.** Ms. Greenwood, Recreation Manager, stated the City has been leasing the Plaza Park Raceway to an outside vendor since 2001. A new agreement with Plaza Park Raceway, LLC, began on January 1, 2012, and is in effect for a three year term, with the option of adding two (2) additional one (1) year terms.

Ms. Greenwood stated that per the terms of the agreement, Plaza Park Raceway, LLC, has submitted their proposed schedule for the 2014 racing season to be reviewed at this meeting. The agreement allows for "28 (racing) events per year restricted to Fridays with the exception of up to three (3) Saturday evening races per year."

Mr. Woodhouse is proposing the following for the 2014 calendar year.

- 27 racing events, from 5:30 pm to 11:00 pm.
- One practice day,
- Three outside Special Events,
- Eight practice sessions for individuals on Wednesdays from 5:30 pm to 8:30 pm, staff will be informed of dates in advance.

Ms. Greenwood said in addition to the proposed schedule, Mr. Woodhouse plans to continue to look for other events that can utilize the raceway. Concert dates were included in the proposed schedule but he does not have specific events planned at this time. Therefore, staff and Mr. Woodhouse have agreed that he will bring them independently to the Commission for approval as they are scheduled.

Ms. Greenwood said Mr. Woodhouse has been a good tenant and while maintaining the facility, he has struggled with the financial portion of his lease. Ms. Greenwood informed the Commission that the balance stated in the staff report had been paid and that Mr. Woodhouse has submitted a request for credit for repairs to the facility (\$4,000), bringing his account current.

Mr. Woodhouse stated that he is working toward concerts but has agreed to leave them off for now. He said overall 2013 was a success. He said he made the payment on his balance and feels positive about it. He said part of the success was that the car count was up for the races, but mostly it was due to the family oriented attitude of the racers. He said the Turkey race was the largest race of the year and most of the racers were first time racers. This race had the highest paid attendance since he took over the facility. He said everyone was pleased and said they would return.

Mr. Woodhouse said he removed the old score board and replaced it with an LED score board. He said he also replaced staff and his security personnel now work for him. He said emergency training has been put in place including heat preparedness. He said he continues to work on noise pollution by checking the decibel levels continually. He said he does not know of any noise complaints at this time.

Commissioner Calhoun called for a motion to approve the race schedule as presented without the scheduled concerts. Commissioner Blue moved to accept the schedule without the concert dates and Commissioner Filiponi seconded the motion.

**MOTION**

Motion passed 5-0

**5. Update on Senior Center Fee Waiver Requests.** Ms. Greenwood stated that at the November 19 Commission meeting City staff presented a recommendation from the Senior Advisory Committee for fee waivers for Senior

Center users. The recommendation included a \$5 per hour fee increase for three bridge groups who utilize the Senior Center on Tuesday, Thursday, and Friday, 15 hours per week.

At the November meeting, Commission heard comments from representatives from the three clubs opposing the fee increase and asking for additional time to respond. The Commission opted to table the item so that City staff could meet with the Senior Advisory Committee to discuss.

Ms. Greenwood said this item was discussed at the November 20, 2013 Senior Advisory Committee. Each group was asked to provide a bank statement to the review committee for further review. The Tuesday and Fridays clubs stated they did not have separate bank accounts for their groups and could not provide such documents. The Thursday group did not submit the requested documents.

Ms. Greenwood stated the Facility Review Committee reconvened on December 5 to meet with the club owners to discuss the fee increase recommendation. The Review Committee submits to the Commission the following findings.

- The Thursday night bridge group is sanctioned by the ACBL (American Contract Bridge League). As part of this sanction, they have a board of directors who manage the club activities and funds. Although the group has a large reserve account, they are not showing a profit from their use of the Senior Center.
- There are two additional bridge groups utilizing the Senior Center. They operate under the Thursday night group's sanction, and as private businesses. Each club has an "owner" who purchased the club from a previous owner, and neither club has a separate bank account. The proceeds (at year-end) go to the owner. Based on financial reports provided to the committee, the profit for 2012 was \$1,504 for the Tuesday group and \$2,884 for the Friday group (in addition to "director" fees collected).
- All three groups collect user fees (\$5 per game) and all pay a "Director" to officiate the games, generally \$30 per day, although the Friday club owner stated he is changing his director fee to \$50 per day. In most cases, the "owner" serves as the director and collects this daily rate.

Ms. Greenwood stated that based on these findings, the Advisory Committee representatives recommend that, a) because the groups are showing a profit at the end of the year and b) because two of the groups are operating as private businesses, the bridge clubs could, and should contribute more towards operational costs of the facility. She said the consensus of the Review Committee is to continue the recommendation of a fee increase because the City should not subsidize a private business. She noted that the fee increase still represents a City subsidy in the amount of \$18,229 for the one year period. It should also be noted that the committee gave the clubs the option to provide in-kind contributions to the facility (\$1,000 per group) rather than pay the increased fee. The clubs have not responded to this option.

#### **Bridge Club Response:**

- They provide a service, a "social club" for seniors, not a business.
- An increase in rental fees would result in raising fees to play and will cause participation to drop. The proposed increase, based on current participation numbers represents a 50 cent increase for the two weekday clubs and a 90 cent increase for the evening club. (Adding to the current rate of \$5 rate, participants would pay less than \$6 for the 4.5 hour function).
- Club "owners," although they receive compensation, are not compensated for all of the time and expenses that they put into the club. (Financial statements that were submitted by the clubs show that they do make a "profit" at the end of the year).
- The clubs claim that they originally used the Senior Center free of charge and voluntarily started paying a small amount to the City. The City has increased fees over the last several years. (7 years ago two of the clubs were paying \$2.50 per hour for use. Their fees have been increased incrementally over the years to bring them to the \$15/hour rate, consistent with the third bridge club).
- Club owners do not feel that they should be required to show their financial records and feel that there should be confidentiality related to their finances – "it's none of the City's business." (Sharing financial information is a condition of the fee modification and once information is submitted it becomes public record).
- The bridge clubs contribute consistent revenue of over \$10,000 per year. Can the City afford to give up that revenue? (If necessary, staff will work to fill the 14.5 hours per week with rentals at the full rate and/or revenue generating programs offered by the City).
- One owner wants to know the guideline on how much profit can be made in order to qualify for a fee waiver.

- Will fees continue to increase, are the clubs going to go through this every year? (Fee waiver requests are reviewed every year and a recommendation is made based on the criteria. If clubs continue to make money there is the potential for additional increases in future years).

Ms. Greenwood stated the written communication from the Tuesday bridge club stated that Ms. Cheng is withdrawing her application for a fee reduction as she no longer intends to hold her games at the City facility. She said other than an email she received from the Thursday evening club expressing her disappointment; Ms. Greenwood said she has not heard from the other groups. She said when the clubs met with the Review Committee their comment was that if the fee was increased they would seek an alternate location for their games.

Commissioner Calhoun asked if they responded to the in-kind offer. Ms. Greenwood said the clubs never seemed to consider the option. Commissioner Calhoun stated that at last month's meeting it was made clear to them that they had the choice.

Commissioner Mann said she did not remember them ever discussing the choice but felt it was made very clear to the clubs that they had the option. Commissioner Mann felt that since the clubs are making a profit they should pay the value of the time they use the facility.

Commissioner Calhoun asked if there was a consensus on the Advisory Committee that the clubs should pay the fee increase. Commissioner Mann said yes.

Commissioner Calhoun also stated, that even with the increase the City would still be subsidizing \$18,229 per year. She also asked if the increased fee was in-line with the benefit tiers of the recreation programs fee structure. Ms. Greenwood stated that this would fall into the Cost Recovery tier and would not be eligible for a fee reduction.

Commissioner Blue asked if it would be a challenge to replace the hours that the bridge clubs utilize. Ms. Greenwood stated it would take time but it's definitely possible.

Commissioner Mann read Ms. Cheng's final statement in her communication with Ms. Greenwood – "I challenge the City Recreation Department to consider whether your true goal is to serve Visalia seniors, or are you in the business of renting the Senior Center at full rate and/or revenue generating programs offered by the City?" Commissioner Mann noted that knowing someone is profiting, is it appropriate for tax payers to subsidize these clubs. Commissioner Calhoun stated the clubs are not part of the senior community; they do not partake of the senior meals or otherwise contribute. Commissioner Mann stated they are free to choose another venue if they found one at a better price.

Commissioner Calhoun called for a motion to accept the Senior Advisory Committees recommendation to increase fee from \$15 to \$20 per hour for the bridge clubs.

Commissioner Doi so moved and Commissioner Blue seconded the motion.

#### **MOTION**

Motion passed 5-0

#### **6. Recommendation for the Commission to Support a Housing Related Parks (HRP) Program for Either Oval Park or Village Park.**

Mr. Elizondo introduced Mr. Kreps and Mr. Guerrero as community supporters of this program. He said they are both members of the North Visalia Neighborhood Advisory Committee (NVNAC) and Mr. Guerrero works for Proteus at the Wittman Center, adjacent to Village Park.

Mr. Elizondo stated that the City of Visalia is applying for a grant under the Housing Related Parks Program (HRP), which is an incentive grant program for cities that have provided affordable housing in their communities. The funding may be utilized toward qualifying parks or recreation facilities. He said the grant amount is \$172,900 and must be used in an area that is underserved related to availability of parks. Mr. Elizondo said there are two such areas in Visalia – Oval Park and Village Park. He said there is a time-line for the grant submission and a recommendation needs to be forwarded to City Council.

Mr. Elizondo stated that in recent months, Mr. Kreps and the NVNAC presented their five top priorities for Oval Park, along with recommendations by the Commission, which were forwarded to City Council. He said the Council then chose their priorities which were the wrought iron fence and installing security lighting.

Mr. Elizondo said another choice would be Village Park. This park is very small and has a section of grass that is over used. He said this park is a good candidate for synthetic turf and the grant would be sufficient for this project. The turf would be good year round, no matter the weather.

Mr. Elizondo said he is requesting that the Commission accept the City staff report, accept public testimony, and make a recommendation to the Council for priority usage for the Housing Related Parks Grant for either Oval Park or Village Park.

Mr. Guerrero said he is not speaking on behalf of the NVNAC, and he is the Director at the Wittman Village Community Center. He said he and Mr. Elizondo have spoken about artificial turf for Village Park for the last several years. He said his focus is on the families and children living in the area and Village Park gets tremendous use by those families. Several years ago Village Park was renovated with lighting and a new playground. He said he is at the park Monday through Friday and sometimes on the weekends he sees many families picnic at the park and doing positive activities. He said games played are kickball, flag football, and soccer, which is very taxing on the grass. He requested Commissioners consider the project for Village Park. He said the area is densely populated and really needs the upgrade.

Mr. Guerrero said he attended a public meeting and heard Mr. Michael Olmos, City Manager, speak regarding the Lincoln Oval Park. He said there is a lot of dysfunction in this park, and many challenges still to be accomplished there. He said that in comparison, Village Park has no challenges, and it is by far the better choice for this project funding.

Mr. Michael Kreps, Architect, agreed that the children at Village Park are intense players and the wear on the grass keeps it in need of repair. He said if there is any area that could use the funding he would urge the Commissioners to choose this as the project area, and it would be great to see the kids use it year round. He also said he serves on the NVNAC, but he is speaking as a private citizen.

Commissioner Mann asked what it's like to play on artificial turf when it is 100 degrees outside. Mr. Bean said it is a synthetic so it does get warm, but not hot enough to burn someone. Mr. Elizondo stated the area is about ½ an acre and the maintenance to the turf would be minimal, turf life is about 15 years. Commissioner Blue asked what the cost is to repair the existing grass. Mr. Bean replied about \$2,000 annually; but the hardest part closing the area for two months to do the required maintenance.

Commissioner Calhoun stated the Oval and Village Parks are both worthy projects, but she asked which one would possibly draw private donations over the other. Mr. Elizondo said there is no answer to that question, as both would do well with the right marketing campaign.

Commissioner Doi commented that as soon as the artificial turf is installed the department will have accomplished instant gratification from the families and children. He said with the challenges at Oval Park, because of the funding amount and having to phase the project, it will take years to make a difference.

Commissioner Calhoun called for a motion. Commissioner Mann moved to support Village Park in the application for the funding from the HRP grant, and Commissioner Filiponi seconded the motion.

## **MOTION**

Motion passed 5-0

- 7. Request from the new Mural Policy Review Committee for a Parks & Recreation Commission Representative.** Mr. Elizondo stated this issue has come up in recent Council meetings, and the media. He said the City has a policy but it is not adequate, and recently, a lot of interest has been expressed by non-profits, private citizens, and other organizations regarding murals in Visalia. City Council is requesting particular individuals to come together to improve the policy.

Mr. Elizondo said he received an e-mail from Wally Roeben, Convention Center Manager, requesting a Commissioner to join the committee for this purpose. He said the first meeting will be this Friday, December 20, at noon. Mr. Elizondo said that once the project is done the committee will disband.

After discussion, Commissioner Mann said she would volunteer.

- 8. Request to Select a Commissioner to Serve on the Interview Board for the East Side Regional Park Consultant Selection Process.** Mr. Elizondo stated the City has purchased 240 acres on the east side of Visalia. It is bordered by 198 on the south and Houston Avenue to the north and the property now consists of an orchard. This will become the East Side Regional Park and Storm Basins. Mr. Elizondo noted there are three creeks that run through the property. Current plans include taking some run-off to recharge the aquifers. He said the first step is to choose a consultant to develop a Master Plan. Mr. Elizondo stated this is a huge job and will probably draw many applications from consultants around the state. The City will probably interview the top 7 or 8 applicants and will be choosing a panel to assist with the decision of choosing the consultant to recommend to City Council. The selection panel will be an all-day event, meals will be provided, and the date is unknown at this time.

Commissioner Calhoun said she would like to volunteer for this committee.

- 9. Election of Parks & Recreation Commission Chairperson & Vice Chairperson.** Mr. Elizondo said this election takes place annually, according to the regulations that govern the Commission. The Chair and Vice Chair serve for 1 year, and if anyone wants to serve they should speak up or nominations can be made. Commissioner Doi made a

motion to nominate Commissioner Calhoun as Chairperson and Commissioner Filiponi as Vice Chairperson. They both agreed to serve a second term. Commissioner Blue seconded the motion.

## **MOTION**

Motion passed 5-0

### **10. Update on City Council Reports & City Staff Announcements.**

- **Upcoming Recreation Programs & Special Events.** Ms. Greenwood reported the following.
  - The Winter Dance Recital is tonight featuring jazzy hip hop, ballet, folkloric, contemporary, including our Kinder Enrichment programs at the Enchanted Theater.
  - Friday is also the Senior Center Holiday party. If you'd like to attend please send an e-mail to RSVP.
  - The Saturday Night Dance group organizer withdrew his request to use the Senior Center as he is no longer able to continue.
  - The senior meals program Request for Proposal closes on Friday. The hospital informed City staff that they would not be submitting a bid.
  - The spring brochure will be out in late January.
  - Spring registration begins in February for programming in March, April, and May.
  - The Senior Center participated in Visalia's first Veteran's Day Parade.
  - 2014 will be the 75<sup>th</sup> Anniversary for the Parks & Recreation Department and there is a marketing plan in place to celebrate.
  - Father/Daughter Dance tickets are on sale now. This year the dance is expanded to two nights, Friday, March 7, and Saturday, March 8; back by popular demand.
  - The department will be hosting a fishing derby on Saturday, January 11, at Plaza Park.
  - Tule Fog Run on January 25.
  - The Winter Day Camp runs for three weeks at the Anthony Center.
  - The softball tournament directors meeting will be held in January, which includes setting up the tournament schedule for the 2013-14 season.
  - Youth basketball practices going on now. This year we had the largest basketball registration in years with over 600 participants.
- **Upcoming Parks & Urban Forestry Projects, Programs & Special Events.**
  - Light poles have been replaced at Plaza Park. Six more will be replaced in July 2014 using CIP funds.
  - A CIP will also be submitted to replace of some chain link fencing in Plaza Park Softball Complex that has deteriorated over the years.
  - We will be installing some variable frequency drives on our irrigation pumps.
  - The pickle ball courts have gone out to bid. The award will take place on January 3.
  - Our new Urban Forestry Manager, Joel Hooyer, will start on December 2.
  - The Lions Club has built their monument at Lions Park.

Commissioner Calhoun asked if all the shade structures were complete and Mr. Bean replied yes.

- **Director's Report on Administrative Items.** Mr. Elizondo said the budget process has begun for the department. He said it's a 3-4 month project that goes to City Council for approval. The goal is to have it adopted by July 1, 2014. He said the budget will be coming to the Commission in February or March.

### **11. Commissioner's Requests & Comments:**

- **North Visalia Neighborhood Advisory Committee. Vacant.**
- **Parks & Recreation Foundation.** Commissioner Doi said he attended the meeting held December 3 at the Chamber of Commerce conference room. He said he and the new Mayor, Steve Nelsen, became Board Members. Mr. Steve Olmos, City Manager, was accepted as an Advisory Member. He reported that 2014 will be the last year that the Foundation will be organizing the 4<sup>th</sup> of July Celebration and they are seeking another service club or organization to sponsor it. He explained that the Foundation is losing money because of the time necessary to put it on. The Foundation wants to spend more time raising donations for worthwhile efforts for the community. He also introduced the Save Mart cards dedicated to raising funds for the Foundation. He said the Saputo Company was very happy with the Sports Park Dedication and their donation.
- **Waterways & Trails Committee Report.** The committee is working on numerous projects including partnering with the Audubon Society on the bird/bike tour, Bike to Work Week, and spring time projects.
- **Senior Citizens Advisory Committee Update.** No report.

- **Swim Club Sub-Committee Update.** Commissioner Blue stated that the committee met on December 5, Thursday, and to discuss rebuilding the teams to create a fourth swim team in Visalia. He said the teams are cyclical in membership and some are in disarray. Leadership and coach changes cause this to happen. He said some of the problem was the rotation of school pool use. One week they are at Golden West and then the next two weeks they are at El Diamanté. He said he did not know this was going on. He said that right now was not a good time to add a fourth team. He said it should be discussed and planned one year from now. It would be good for each team be assigned a particular school pool.

Ms. Greenwood stated nothing was decided at the meeting. She said not only is there pool rotation but the scheduled time is not always the same. One week it could be 7 to 8 pm, or 6:30 to 7:30 pm. A consistent schedule is necessary for success. She said this will be taken to the school district this week.

Mr. Elizondo thanked Commissioner Blue for attending. He said it is challenging to work with these groups due to different leadership styles and philosophies. He said the greatest challenge is that if we assign teams to schools based on their current enrollment, Redwood has the most kids and the smallest pool.

Commissioner Mann asked how many participants go to VAST instead of our local teams. Ms. Greenwood said she does not know the numbers for VAST but many of the kids do both. She noted that VAST and TNT are the same organization. Another swim team, the Visalia Swim Club, operates at College of the Sequoia (COS).

Commissioner Calhoun asked if the three teams are assigned to a pool, doesn't that leave out one school and there would not be a fourth team? In addition, wouldn't that affect the quality of the high school team? Commissioner Blue said it is a valid question, but he feels if Redwood was left out they might not mind because scheduling for their own swim programs would be less complicated. He also stated that open enrollment is an issue. He said what he thinks the school district and the City is looking for is balanced participation and balanced pool time.

Mr. Elizondo said what is unknown is who would switch teams based on convenience of driving to swim at the neighborhood school as opposed to driving across town to swim with your team. The City believes that folks are going to go with convenience to the closest school.

Commissioner Blue said he intended to attend some of their workouts just to observe what is going on. He said in his experience it becomes a social event for the parents, everyone becomes connected. He stated the issues with the teams are not going to be fixed overnight; it will take a few years.

Commissioner Mann asked if any City programs are held at the COS pool or if any teams use it. Ms. Greenwood said there is no programming there. She said it is very small and old.

**12. Adjourn to Regular Meeting, January 21, 2014, at the Council Chambers at 707 W. Acequia Street, 5:30 pm.**  
Commissioner Blue made a motion to adjourn and Commissioner Doi seconded the motion.

**MOTION**

Motion passed 5-0

Brenda Miernik  
Senior Administrative Assistant