

**Visalia Parks & Recreation Commission**  
**Meeting Minutes**  
**May 17, 2016**

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

The Visalia Parks & Recreation Commission met in a regular meeting on Tuesday, May 17, 2016, at the Council Chambers located at 707 Acequia Street, Visalia, California. The meeting was called to order by Chairperson Carla Calhoun at 5:30 p.m.

**Present:** Carla Calhoun, Shann Blue, Ben Filiponi, Jason Kent and George Shelton

**Absent:** Justin Sweet and Peter Thomas

**Guest:** Mr. Gary Alvarez, VYSA President

**Staff:** Jeannie Greenwood, Jeff Fultz and Brenda Miernik

- 2. Review and Approve the Minutes of the Regular Meeting, April 19, 2016.** Commissioner Calhoun noted one change to the April minutes – Item 14 should read May 17 not March 28. Commissioner Kent moved to approve the minutes as corrected, Commissioner Filiponi seconded the motion.

**MOTION**

Motion passed 4 -0

Commissioner Shelton tendered his resignation and thanked the Commission for their time.

- 3. Public Comment:** Mary Jo Eastes and Johanna Coyne, players with Pickleball Visalia, came to the podium and thanked the Department for creating pickleball courts at Recreation Park and for a successful tournament two weeks ago. Ms. Eastes said that Pickleball Visalia has 277 registered members and the group has outgrown the current facility at Recreation Park. She stated the courts are heavily used and they often have people waiting for courts during play. Ms. Eastes requested that the City consider adding additional lighted courts to the facility at Recreation Park and that the City install lights in the current facility, as the existing lights are not adequate. In addition, Ms. Eastes asked if the City would consider designating the back two courts at Plaza Park as pickleball courts and removing the existing tennis nets. She requested that netting be hung on the south end of the courts to prevent injuries from incoming softballs from games played on the adjacent ball field. Ms. Eastes also asked the City to install sidewalk on the east side of courts 7 & 8 to alleviate the amount of dirt that is tracked onto the courts. She stated that players would like the City to re-surface the courts. Ms. Coyne said she realizes that the City has many on-going projects, but the players would really appreciate the consideration of these additional projects.

Commissioner Calhoun thanked Ms. Eastes and Ms. Coyne for their comments and said that overuse of this facility is a great problem to have.

Lisa Wallace Dutra, of Quad Knopf announced the upcoming Active Transportation Plan (ATP) public input meeting. She said workshop #1 will be held at Mt. Whitney High School, Thursday, May 19, from 5:30 to 7:30 pm. The school is located at 900 S. Conyer Street in Visalia. She said the second workshop is scheduled for July 9, at the Manuel Hernandez Community Center, located at 247 W. Ferguson Avenue, at 9:30 am. She said the City of Visalia is looking for what residents want for the future of the bike and pedestrian network. Everyone is invited and snacks and beverages will be provided.

Ms. Dutra said Quad Knopf has been hired by the City of Visalia to create the first Active Transportation Plan and it will incorporate the City's Master Plan and the Waterways and Trails Master Plan. Grants will be used to partially fund this project. The plan includes multiple community outreach workshops.

Rick Hernandez, Chairperson of the North Visalia Neighborhood Advisory Committee, read a note he composed to the Parks and Recreation commission. It read "The recent improvements in Oval Park, including the perimeter fence, Caltrans street improvements, and the upcoming installation of the new playground, have provided more than new amenities, they have provided a new opportunity. In order for these amenities to be enjoyed and utilized, it is the recommendation of this committee to remove four tables, eight benches and the concrete base underneath the gazebo, for the purpose of dissuading illegal activity (consumption of alcoholic beverages, drug use and sales, gambling, etc.) and its corresponding behavior (public urination and defecation, littering, violence, etc.) It is our contention that by removing these amenities, the absence of these activities would reduce calls for service to Visalia Police Department, and provide a more inviting environment for families and the community as a whole. We respectfully submit this recommendation after a unanimous vote taken March 10, 2016. Two members were absent. Mr. Hernandez requested that this to be an item for discussion at the June Parks and Recreation meeting.

Commissioner Calhoun said she would like to know if removing amenities at parks has been proven to decrease crime. She also asked about crime in other City parks. Mr. Hernandez replied that the removal of the benches at the Garden Street Plaza has reduced loitering. Commissioner Calhoun invited questions from her fellow commissioners. Commissioner Calhoun also suggested the City do public outreach to find out what other users might want. She noted that new lighting and cameras are going to be installed soon; and she asked if that wouldn't deter crime in the park? Mr. Filiponi suggested allowing enough time for these new additions before making any changes in the park. Commissioner Calhoun said the item will be on the June agenda to discuss the following: research that proves whether or not removing amenities decreases crime in parks, the timeline for installing the cameras at the park, and to discuss an appropriate time to see if the cameras are deterring crime, and the creation of a plan to do public outreach to park users.

Bill Huott said he did not remember so much consideration when the benches at Jefferson Park were removed, or when the Ruiz Park benches were removed. He said active amenities are what add value to a park, not passive ones.

Mr. Bob Ludekins said he believes the park amenities must be removed to clean up the park.

**4. Request by Visalia Youth Softball Association (VYSA) to Host the Best of the West Softball Tournament at Whitendale Park, June 3-5, Friday through Sunday.** Ms. Greenwood, Director of Parks and Recreation, supplied the following information pertaining to this request:

- The Best of the West tournament has three divisions: 8 and under, 10 and under and 12 and under. It is anticipated that there will be at least six teams per division from across the Central Valley.
- Tournament play will take place on Friday between 5-7 p.m. and on Saturday and Sunday between 8 a.m. – 7 p.m.
- Temporary fencing will be placed around the park and the Association will charge an entry fee, which is common practice. VYSA has been asked to post signs announcing the park closure for this event.
- The tournament will take place on softball fields 1-4. The event's size and scope would have a significant impact on other park users should they be allowed to co-exist. The impact on parking and restrooms will also be significant. The total charge for this event is \$432, which includes rental charges for all arbors.
- The City has a 5-year contract with VYSA allowing them access to the Whitendale softball complex between the months of March-May; however this tournament is outside the contract term.

Staff is recommending the Parks and Recreation Commission authorize the Director of Parks and Recreation to issue a permit to close Whitendale Park for the tournament with the recommendations listed in the staff report.

Mr. Alvarez, President of VYSA, said the tournament is a fundraiser for field maintenance and helps offset children's fees. Flyers go out to the entire neighborhood advising the residents of the event and that the park will be closed. Once the games are over for the day the access points are opened so neighbors can walk their pets. He said many of the kids will be involved in graduations on Friday during the day so only the fences will be going up and games will begin after 5 p.m.

Ms. Greenwood asked how many participants he has. Mr. Alvarez replied that his numbers are down this year because a new league was formed and they play on the diamonds at Divisidero. He said he is going to make an effort next year to get his numbers back up.

Commissioner Filiponi made a motion to approve the request as presented and Commissioner Kent seconded the motion.

**MOTION**

Motion passed 4 -0

**5. Review of Arbor Day Event, April 30, 2016.** Mr. Fultz, Parks and Urban Forestry Manager, said the event was well attended with about 37 volunteers and approximately 19 hours of service. 300 trees and plants were placed and the project was completed around 11:00 a.m.

Commissioner Calhoun said she and her husband planted three trees and it was an excellent event.

**6. Proclaiming July as Parks & Recreation Month.** Ms. Greenwood stated that historically this item has been brought to the commission annually in May or June. It wasn't until the agenda was released that it came to our attention that the City has a policy regarding annual submissions for Proclamations. The policy states that these will be issued every three years. Ms. Greenwood said the department will continue to promote July as Parks and Recreation month and has many free programs offered.

**7. Potential Sales Tax Ballot Measure.** Ms. Greenwood stated the City has been considering adding a sales tax measure in November to support the City's essential services to residents and is seeking community input. Two independent committees, the Citizens Advisory Committee (CAC) and the Ballot Measure Advisory Committee

(BMAC), met from 8/15 through 1/16 to research information and formulate recommendations to submit to City Council. Both groups recommended Council to move forward with a half-cent sales tax increase for essential services. The City also hired an outside consultant who polled the public and the result was that the public would likely support a sales tax measure.

Ms. Greenwood gave a PowerPoint presentation of information that has been disseminated throughout the community to service clubs and organizations by various staff members. She said she presented it to the Soroptimist organization a few weeks ago.

The presentation covered the following topics:

State of the City – Challenges You May Not Know: the 2008 financial meltdown changed cities.

Police staffing has remained constant but:

- Homeless demands have risen dramatically. 200 to 3,400 in the last decade. 200 to 3,400 in the last decade.
- 911 calls have risen twice as fast as the population. 1,400 over the last year.
- Prop 47/Realignment has more criminals on the street.
- Felony property crimes are now misdemeanors - \$950 or less.

The mileage of streets has increased but:

- State street funding has decreased.
- Street maintenance costs \$2.20 per square foot when in good condition, but \$4 per foot when in poor condition.

Fire staffing has remained constant but:

- Equipment has aged without replacement options.
- Maintenance of equipment keeps insurance rates down.

Visalia's major funding source, sales tax, has increased but:

- Is growing slowly due to internet sales (not always taxed).
- People are spending less on taxable goods than in the past per capita and inflation adjusted revenues are down. The crash of 2008 has affected everyone's pension. The City has revised pension plans five times but the City, like all CalPERS cities, is having to make extra payments, thus taking money away from other services.

Visalia does not have a utility tax while surrounding areas do such as Tulare, Porterville, Dinuba and Lindsay. Mr. Fultz said the utility tax is strictly to the citizens of Visalia. The benefit of a sales tax is that 40% of revenues would come from those who do not live in Visalia but who shop or do business in Visalia.

Passing a sales tax measure would provide funds to support the following:

- Police staffing needs
- Fire equipment maintenance and staffing
- Streets funds for road maintenance
- Parks – Visalia has over 40 parks and an active trail system. The community values City parks and values them as essential to the quality of life and creating community. Funds from a tax measure would go to maintain parks, facilities and programs.

Ms. Greenwood asked for questions. She said the City welcomes any comments on this initiative. Commissioner Kent asked if there was a spending plan in place. She replied not at this time. The City is gathering comments and information from the public at this time.

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

- **Upcoming Recreation Programs & Special Events.** Ms. Greenwood reported the following.
  - The department is experiencing some staffing changes. Jason Glick, Recreation Supervisor, who has been with the City for 17 years, has accepted a position with the City of Lemoore as Community Services Director. His last day will be June 3 and the department will be having a potluck at the Anthony Community Center. You are welcome to join us. Lesha Weatherford, our front Office Assistant, has accepted a position with Tulare County Office of Education and her last day will be Wednesday, the 25<sup>th</sup>. Laurissa Roggenkamp will be filling the Recreation Manager position next week. Ramon Sanchez will retire after 25 years of service and he will be leaving July 1.
  - The Mother's Day Tea was held May 7<sup>th</sup> at the Anthony Community Center and it was very successful.
  - The summer brochure is out and the department is taking program registrations.

- **Upcoming Parks & Urban Forestry Projects, Programs & Special Events.**

- The Oval Park playground and shade structure is installed. The fence is up and functioning and the safety material is in place. A playground safety inspection is now necessary before opening it to the public.
  - The Oval Park lighting project is underway and is a 30-day project. The irrigation for the park has been shut off for this project and the trees and shrubs are suffering. West Coast Arborists will be watering trees, plants and shrubs for us but we will see damage to the turf.
  - The irrigation well went down at Fairview Park. Willits Pump has been working on a cost estimate and time line for completing the work. This project has been approved and emergency repair funds allocated. Because the well is not functional, West Coast Arborists will be watering the plants, trees & shrubs at Fairview as well but turf will be stressed and potentially lost until we can get water back to the site.
  - The department is gearing up for turf renovation at Riverway Sports Park. In June the fields will be fenced off for raising sprinkler heads, filling in holes and reseeded the turf. Irrigation will go on for 21 days.
  - The parking lot on the west side of Whitendale Community Center is being replaced and it may impact the Best of the West event.
- **Director's Report on Administrative Items.** Ms. Greenwood reported the following.
    - Last evening Council approved staff to enter into a service contract with the HLA Group for Phase V of the Riverway Sports Park. Mr. Canada designed the first four phases of the park. The local paper printed an article which reported that Phase V was being funded by Measure R funds but this is incorrect. Phase V will be funded by Park Impact fees.
    - The Senior Meal contract was also approved; this is a five year contract for food services for the Visalia Senior Center.
    - The mural project at the Senior Center should be completed this month.
    - The request from the Optimist Club for their Annual Fishing Derby came to the department too late to place on the agenda last month so it was taken directly to Council and they approved for this weekend.

**9. Commissioner's Requests & Comments:**

- **Community/Aquatic Center Ad Hoc Committee.** Commissioner Blue said there have been no meetings yet. He said the bids were reviewed and LDA was chosen for the contract. LDA is working with City staff on the details.
- **Senior Citizens Advisory Committee.** Ms. Greenwood said she did not attend the meeting.
- **Parks & Recreation Foundation.** Commissioner Kent said the Foundation is considering a signature event in the fall which will be a grilled cheese cook-off. Ms. Hays also the Foundation will also be placing another marker at the Trees of Life Project.
- **Waterways & Trails Committee Report.** Ms. Greenwood said the committee discussed the Active Transportation Plan with the Engineering Department and consultant and reviewed requests/projects for the next funding cycle.
- **North Visalia Neighborhood Advisory Committee.** Mr. Fultz said he attended the meeting and presented the Park Ranger Program report. The committee was very receptive.

Commissioner Kent inquired if Council approved the department to move forward with the volunteer ranger program following the Joint Meeting. Ms. Greenwood said no direction had been given directly related to the program but she thinks it is definitely worth looking into. She said the department has changed the direction of advertising for retired volunteers and she has received some great contacts.

Mr. Fultz said the sales tax would help these programs. He said issues that happen during the week takes away from our maintenance staff. Staff averages about 20 hours per week - on park issues. Ms. Greenwood said the plan for the sales tax measures.

**10. Adjourn to the regular meeting, June 21, 2016, at the Council Chambers located at 707 W. Acequia Street, at 5:30 p.m.**

Commissioner Blue moved to adjourn and Commissioner Filiponi seconded the motion.

**MOTION**

Motion passed 4-0

Brenda Miernik,  
Senior Administrative Assistant