MINUTES OF THE MEETING OF THE PARKS AND RECREATION ADVISORY BOARD

North Collier Regional Park

Naples, Florida

September 18, 2019

LET IT BE REMEMBERED, the Collier County Parks and Recreation Advisory Board in and for the County of Collier, having conducted business herein, met on this date at 1:53 P.M. at North Collier Regional Park, 15000 Livingston Road, Naples, FL, with the following members present:

CHAIRMAN: Mr. Edward “Ski” Olesky

VICE-CHAIRPERSON: Ms. Mary Bills

Ms. Daphnie Bercher, Advisory Board Member

Mr. Joshua Fruth, Advisory Board Member

Ms. Rebecca Gibson-Laemel, Advisory Board Member

ALSO PRESENT:

Mr. Barry Williams, Division Director, Parks and Recreation Division

Ms. Jeanine McPherson, Assistant Director, Parks and Recreation Division

Mr. Miguel Rojas, Jr., Administrative Assistant, Parks and Recreation Division

Ms. Margaret Bishop, Principal Project Manager, Facilities Management

Mr. Brad Cornell, Southwest Florida Policy Associate, Audubon of the Western Everglades

Mr. Casey Doyle, Sports and Special Events Coordinator, Parks and Recreation Division

Ms. Olema Edwards, Regional Manager, Parks and Recreation Division

Ms. Anne Foster, Chairperson, Community Services Advisory Board, City of Naples

Ms. Maura Kraus, Principle Environmental Specialist, Parks and Recreation Division

Mr. Dana Souza, Community Services Director, City of Naples

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**I. Call to Order**

**II. Pledge of Allegiance and Invocation**

The Pledge of Allegiance was recited, and a moment of silence observed.

**III. Approval of the Agenda**

***Ms. Bills entered a motion to approve the September 18, 2019 meeting agenda. Ms. Gibson-Laemel seconded the motion. All members were in favor. The motion was carried.***

**IV. Approval of August 21, 2019 Minutes**

***Ms. Bills*** ***entered a motion to approve the August 21, 2019 meeting minutes. The motion was seconded by Ms. Gibson-Laemel. All members were in favor. The motion was carried.***

**V. Capital Projects Update – Ms. Bishop**

**+Big Corkscrew Island Regional Park:** Seven bid responses were received for Phase I construction. The lowest bid was received from Astra Construction at $45,065,454.00. The company is based in Atlanta and has an office in Bradenton; however, would open an office in Naples. The second lowest bid was submitted by Cleveland Construction at $46,663,040.31. The BCC Contract Award is scheduled for the October 8, 2019 meeting, which will move the Phase I construction start date to November 2019.

**+East Naples Community Park Master Plan:** The electrical design is at approximately 75%, which will include an electrical upgrade for the entire park. Design is near completion for 10 additional pickleball courts as well, with work anticipated to be completed in time for the next tournament, scheduled for April 18, 2020. An engineering firm will be hired to design the new Welcome Center, with plans for completion of this structure in 2021.

**+Ann Olesky Park:** Design plans are at 100%, however the project remains pending permitting by the Army Corp of Engineers, which now includes a request by the Bureau of Archeological Research for completion of a Cultural Assessment Survey. Once permitting is approved, the project will be noticed for construction bids.

**+Lazy River Bridge Replacement:** Design work continues and is presently at 90%

**VI. New Business**

1. **Dogs on the Beach – Mr. Dana Souza, Ms. Anne Foster**

Mr. Souza and Ms. Foster addressed PARAB for discussion and solicitation of feedback on the possibility of allowing dogs on designated beaches, an initiative introduced by Naples resident, Ms. Cindy Myers, in presentation to the Naples City Council.

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Ms. Myers had specifically proposed allowing owners with unleashed dogs on the beach at Lowdermilk Park; Monday through Friday, sunrise to 8:30 a.m. Dogs would be required to be leashed while traveling through the park itself. The Naples City Council referred the issue to the Community Services Advisory Board (CSAB) for further review. Community feedback is now being solicited on this topic prior to final recommendation by the CSAB to the Naples City Council. Mr. Souza stated that the pros and cons of the Lowdermilk Park site had been discussed by the CSAB, with concern expressed at that time at the high level of beachgoer traffic at this location. Clam Pass was a secondary site which had also been discussed. Mr. Souza requested feedback from PARAB and Parks Staff as to other potential County beach locations which may be considered to allow unleashed dogs, as well as a general recommendation in favor of or against the issue. Mr. Souza expressed an understanding of the existing County ordinance which prohibits dogs from being on County beaches, and which would require an ordinance change if dogs were to be allowed. Mr. Souza inquired as to the process the petitioner, Ms. Myers, would need to follow in order to formerly address the County on this issue.

Mr. Olesky inquired as to the general feedback given by Naples City Council members at the time of the initial presentation. Mr. Souza noted some general reservations had been expressed, however City Council members had agreed to refer the issue to the CSAB for further discussion, which would include extensive community feedback. The CSAB has planned a public hearing on this topic on November 19, 2019, with a broad mailing planned to notify residents and to encourage attendance. Feedback has already been received from both city and county residents, as well as the Conservancy of Southwest Florida.

Ms. Bercher noted that the City of Fort Myers allows leashed dogs on the beach, with no issues having been reported. Ms. Bercher suggested a possible compromise could be of modifying the existing ordinance to allow leashed dogs as a first step, with re-evaluation for off-leash privileges at a later date. Ms. Bills inquired of Park Staff whether there were any County beaches which were not highly utilized by beachgoers. Mr. Williams noted that Clam Pass has the ability for increased capacity, and which has approximately 3000 linear feet south of the concession area. It was also noted that Delnor-Wiggins State Park currently allows leashed dogs in the area behind the dunes. Mr. Williams stated that Sugden Park has been considered several times over the years as a location to allow dogs; however, this possibility has been rebuffed by the Department of Health due to the inability for adequate flushing of the freshwater lake. Ms. Bills inquired as to whether Keewadin Island was County owned and Mr. Williams stated that portions were controlled by the State of Florida, who allows leashed dogs on the beach, the City of Naples, and Rookery Bay.

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Ms. Maura Kraus, who works with the Sea Turtle Protection Program through the Parks and Recreation Division, stated that she was not in favor of unleashed dogs on the beach during sea turtle nesting season, having shared photographs at the CSAB meeting of an unleashed dog digging up gopher turtle nests on Barefoot Beach in 2017. A photograph was also shared of a sea turtle nest on Vanderbilt Beach which a dog had dug up, despite a protective screen having been put up around the nest in an effort to deter predators. Additional photographs were shared of nests having been dug up on City of Naples Beaches as well.

Mr. Brad Cornell, Policy Associate with Audubon of the Western Everglades and Audubon Corkscrew Swamp Sanctuary, stated that a biologist is utilized to assist with monitoring both summer and winter shorebirds and coastal birds, with the largest Florida locations of habitats found at Fort Myers Beach, Clam Pass Park, Sand Dollar Island at Tigertail Beach, and Caxambas Pass shoals. Mr. Cornell noted the limited habitats in Southwest Florida which support several threatened bird species, whose numbers have continued to decline. Clam Pass Park was noted to host the largest aggregation of winter migratory, threatened Black Skimmers on the Eastern Coast of the United States. Mr. Cornell stated that the constant flushing of the birds interferes with the normal resting habits of these endangered species and expressed doubt that a leashed law would offer full protection due to non-compliance by some owners, such as boaters who arrive with dogs. Further, Mr. Cornell, a dog owner himself, noted having been advised by two veterinarians of the negative health effects on dogs due to being exposed to the beach environment. Ms. Gibson-Laemel inquired as to what these negative effects were. Mr. Cornell stated that the veterinarians had advised of the health hazards associated with exposure to bacteria from fecal matter, as well as saltwater ingestion which leads to gastric distress. Mr. Cornell stated that a “no dogs allowed” policy would be clear to everyone and would also be the safest alternative for dogs, the endangered species at the beaches, as well as beachgoers.

Mr. Williams summarized the discussion by reiterating that Mr. Souza was in the process of gathering feedback from a variety of sources prior to taking a recommendation back to the Naples City Council. The County Ordinance currently disallows dogs on the beaches. Mr. Souza inquired as to the steps necessary to potentially change the existing County Ordinance and was also seeking general feedback from PARAB during this initial discussion phase. Mr. Williams noted that petitioning the Board of County Commissioners for formal discussion would be the first step.

Ms. Bercher stated she could not support a complete change to the existing County Ordinance which disallows dogs on County beaches. Ms. Bills was not in favor of allowing dogs on the beach, particularly noting issues during nesting season. Ms. Gibson-Laemel was not in favor of allowing dogs on the beach due to previously mentioned associated health risks for the dogs, the disruption of animal habitats and nesting, as well as potential disturbance to beachgoers. Mr. Fruth recognized and agreed with environmental concerns, however noted having taken his own leashed dogs to the Sanibel Causeway, without issues.

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Mr. Fruth questioned whether there were any County owned locations that would be suitable for dog use. Mr. Williams stated that local neighborhood input and feedback would be a considerable consideration, even with restriction of access during certain days and times. It was pointed out that the Pelican Bay Foundation has oversight of Clam Pass and permission would need to be sought from that group prior to any changes being made at that location. Mr. Fruth noted the huge draw of beach tourism to Collier County and stated that crowded County beaches were not set up to accommodate dogs on the beach. Mr. Olesky deferred rendering an opinion as he is not a dog owner and does not live in close proximity to the beach, preferring to leave the decision to locals.

Mr. Souza closed by stating that he had frequently taken his two dogs to the beach in Maine, during designated days and hours, without issue. He has also taken his dogs locally to Lovers Key twice, with mixed results; with no issues during low tide, however a visit during high tide resulted in less available ground and increased conflict with beachgoers. Details, including site specifics, hours/day restrictions, environmental issues, and leashed versus unleashed will all have to be taken into consideration.

1. **Pro Watercross Alcohol Permit – Mr. Casey Doyle**

Mr. Doyle addressed PARAB on behalf of Pro Watercross, who will be hosting the annual Watercross World Championship at Sugden Regional Park, October 24-November 4, 2019. Pro Watercross, who is partnering with the Convention and Visitor’s Bureau, is seeking approval to sell alcohol at this event. It was noted by Mr. Williams that strict protocols are enforced by Parks Staff to ensure that the sale of alcohol is very specific in terms of setup, beverages available, time restrictions and security.

***Ms. Bills entered a motion to approve the sale of alcohol at the Pro Watercross World Championship event to be held October 24, 2019 through November 4, 2019. Ms. Bercher seconded the motion. All were in favor. The motion was carried.***

1. **FRPA Updates – Mr. Williams, Ms. Edwards, Ms. McPherson**

Mr. Williams provided an update on the Florida Recreation and Parks Association Annual Conference recently held August 26-29, 2019 in Orlando, FL, which was attended by several members of Parks Staff. The event was attended by approximately 800 people and afforded an excellent opportunity for industry information and idea-sharing. One issue which came under discussion involved the sale of alcohol at events held at County Parks. Ms. Olema Edwards, Regional Manager, attended a workshop on this topic entitled “Brew Economics.” The workshop highlighted craft beer festivals which have become popular nationwide, as well as the general shift towards acceptance of the sale of alcohol within the Parks and Recreation industry in Florida and nationwide.

As part of the discussion, Ms. Edwards expressed an interest in serving beer, wine, and hard seltzer drinks at the annual Snow Fest event on December 7, 2019.

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Survey results from past event participants showed a desire for more amenities for teens and adults. Snow slides and a DJ have been proposed as new additions to the event for teens, as well as a live band and a beer garden for adults. Ms. Edwards has consulted with Risk Management, and was now vetting the idea through PARAB, with a formal presentation to follow in October 2019, following public notice.

Mr. Olesky, Ms. Bills, and Ms. Bercher expressed their support for the sale of alcohol at the Snow Fest event. Mr. Fruth also expressed his support and further suggested the global alcohol policy be reviewed due to the ongoing interest expressed within the community, as well as existing protocols in place for safety and regulation. Ms. Gibson-Laemel was also in favor of allowing the sale of alcohol at the event, noting the controls in place, but suggested the availability of non-alcoholic beverages as well.

Ms. McPherson also discussed the concept of an “impact indicator” which had been a topic of discussion at the FRPA Conference. The impact indicator measures social and economic aspects which illustrate how essential Parks are, as well as the positive contributions made to the community, i.e., housing, tourism, safety, health, environment, and jobs. Mr. Williams noted that this computer program is planned for use within the Collier County Parks Division and the resultant data will be shared with PARAB.

It was noted that Ms. Edwards had been selected to attend the FRPA conference as a coach for the Joe Abrahams Academy for Leadership Excellence in Parks and Recreation. Ms. Edwards mentored 12 new Florida Parks professionals during the event.

**VII. 311 Report – Mr. Williams**

Mr. Williams shared a copy of the PARAB report of 311 issues for the previous 30 days. PARAB members were encouraged to continue to use the program.

**VIII. Directors Highlights – Mr. Williams**

+Mr. Williams solicited an update from Mr. Fruth regarding the status of the Sports Complex project. Mr. Fruth shared 3D renderings of the project and reported construction is moving along at a rapid pace in order to complete the first four fields of Phase I by early Spring 2020. It was noted that Cool Chill infill is under consideration for use on the fields due to a heat reduction of up to 40 degrees in temperature. The Great Lawn will also be completed in Phase I, which is an area that will be open to residents year-round. Amenities will include a food truck pavilion, open bar, fire pits, sandlot volleyball, pickup games, playscape area, a free fitness area, as well as a jumbotron screen, with an emphasis on social gathering. The stadium will support a variety of events and features a recessed field, creating a bowl effect, with completion anticipated in September 2020. The stadium will initially seat 3500, eventually expanding to accommodate 12,000 seats.

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Four infrastructure crews are working onsite, with an expectation to work through October 2019 and then moving onto field work, with turf delivery in November 2019. The Sports Complex is planned for all residents and is not designed solely for sports activities.

+Mr. Williams noted a guest speaker has been invited to attend the October 2019 PARAB meeting to discuss the aquatics program, with ideas to attract college teams, as well as ways to enhance programming for aquatics within the community.

**IX. Public/Board Comments**

+Mr. Olesky requested support from PARAB members to eliminate cast-netting within the Ann Olesky Park. Multiple issues were voiced, including individuals keeping illegal fish, feeding the alligators, and endangering children playing on the bank near the bait. Currently, the Parks Ordinance does not forbid cast-netting at the Ann Olesky Park.

***Mr. Fruth entered a motion to support review and possible revision of the Parks Division Ordinance which allows cast-netting at the Ann Olesky Park. Ms. Bills seconded the motion. All were in favor. The motion was carried.***

+Ms. Bills stated she will be unable to attend the October 2019 PARAB meeting, as she will be on vacation.

**X. Adjournment**

There being no further business for the good of the County, the meeting was adjourned.

**Parks and Recreation Advisory Board**

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**Edward “Ski” Olesky, Chairman**

These minutes approved by the Board/Committee on \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_ as presented, or as amended.

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