

STOW PARKS AND RECREATION BOARD MEETING
Thursday, July 14, 2022 – 4:00 PM

Minutes of the Stow Parks and Recreation Board Meeting held Thursday, July 14 at the Stow Munroe Falls Public Library

Members Present: Christie Sheets, Houston Morgan, Patrick Crawford

Members Absent: Bob Pontius

Others Present: John Pribonic, Mayor; Nick Wren, Director of Public Service, Linda Nahrstedt, Director; Anne Baranek, Supervisor; Tracie McNutt, Marketing Specialist, Kristin Spicer, Recreation Assistant, Ann Malthaner, Library Liaison, Amanda Rome, Outreach Librarian

CALL TO ORDER

Ms. Sheets called the meeting to order at 4:00.

APPROVAL OF MINUTES

Mr. Morgan moved to approve the minutes from the April 14, 2022 meeting once corrections were made, seconded by Mr. Crawford. All were in favor.

PUBLIC COMMENT

Nothing to report.

DEPARTMENT ACTIVITIES REPORTS/UPDATES

Stow City Center Project Update

Ms. Nahrstedt reported:

We are anxiously awaiting the equipment delivery for SKIP Playground. The equipment was supposed to arrive in June. We are working on installing two different signs. One is a huge arch that will be the actual entrance to the playground off the parking lot. There will be a monument sign at the entrance of the driveway at Dirker Boulevard.

We ordered the Northport and Sherwood Acres playground equipment in November, we received the equipment in May, and they are currently working on those playgrounds. We will

plan to have a ribbon cutting ceremony for both playgrounds. Once those dates are confirmed we will let you all know.

Parks Master Plan Update

Ms. Nahrstedt reported:

The Parks Master Plan summary is a guide that has been put together by our consultants, Pro Consultants, and the team from the City. This will be our guide for the next 10 years. This is supposed to elevate our parks system so that it is at a higher level and have more impact in the community. One thing we can say is that we are highly underfunded compared to other recreation programs of similar size and that the City would need to make a substantial investment in the system to see the improvements that are recommended. This does establish a framework and a roadmap for the future but it is not in concrete. It outlines the groundwork needed to transform the system and offers a vision of a system that can energize the community.

It outlines some of the obstacles that we have had over the past 25 years. Operational and capital funding has not been there and is something that we need to work on. We have a lack of indoor community spaces to support our programs to have year round programming and are lacking in other amenities.

We have severe staffing limitations to take care and maintain the park system and to provide the programs that residents want. The aim of the plan is to provide high quality environment, amenities, and programs that appeal to all residents. Create park spaces that are inviting and be able to staff Parks and Recreation services based on the expectations that the community has. Our expectations that the community has come from the survey. The survey has generated the renderings that we have for each of the parks, putting together what people want and trying to think outside of the box and try to not have the staffing limitations that we know we have right now. The funding is an important key but there are a number of items in the plan about how to have dedicated funding, which we do not have for our Parks and Recreation system.

Mr. Wren stated with the feasibility study we are looking at two different options. The first one is a levy that would cover the cost of the facility itself and the other option is a permanent Parks and Recreation Improvement levy, which is similar to what they do in Cuyahoga Falls. Many of the things we have heard in the past is you want to build SKIP Playground but your other playgrounds are falling apart. This would attack that issue with the fact that we would be able to have this facility, if the residents so choose, and at the same time we would still have a permanent funding source for our parks. Currently we are all digging – we have a general fund that controls everything but we are all fighting for the same dollar out of that general fund whether it be the Service Department, Parks, Police, and most of Fire. The key is to see how we can fund our parks without hurting our other services. What we are aiming for is not for people to come to Stow and comment their parks are great but their police force is terrible. We want to be the best we can be at every facet of our operation. In order to do that, the only way we can accomplish anything on this plan is to be able to have some alternative funding to help us.

Ms. Sheets asked would the permanent levy take all of the funds that are needed for Parks and Recreation or just for the parks themselves and the facilities. Mr. Wren responded there would

still be money out of the general fund dedicated to Parks and Recreation. This would be more of a capital improvement fund and a community center fund. What we are looking at would be the employee costs, benefits and the supplies for certain programs – those costs would still come out of the general fund. This would be more a capital and personnel or just capital. We do not know if we are doing a levy – we do not know if the feasibility study will come back and say this area is too saturated – we are just getting started. These are the options that we have on the table currently to look at how to solve some of the problems that we have. Ms. Sheets responded the positive spin on that would be that there could be more money available in the general fund for Police, Fire and other departments. Mr. Wren responded that if you have a dedicated funding source for Parks and Recreation, we do not have a set amount for each department. Every year the request for funds comes to me and I revise the list of requests and have the Mayor decide what we will do moving forward. If you can subtract the costs out for Parks and Recreation capital that does leave more money for equipment, police, fire and service.

Mayor Pribonic asked could you compare our Parks and Recreation department to other surrounding communities. Mr. Wren stated that according to the National Parks and Recreation Association, our Parks and Recreation budget should be between 5% and 7% of your overall operating budget. Our Parks and Recreation budget is 2% of the overall operating budget. I said in the feasibility study today that we could not have existing staff working at that facility because we do not have enough staff to take care of what we currently have. I cannot ask my three building maintenance people to take on this massive facility, when we have 79 other structures that we take care of. We are definitely underfunded. When you take a picture of Northeast Ohio and even central Ohio, our funding is an absolute joke. Even in the Northeast Ohio region, we are well behind where other communities are because we run a skeleton crew, not just in Parks and Recreation, but in most of the other departments also.

The City of Cuyahoga Falls has set numbers and our numbers are variable. If we are going to buy a \$750,000 fire truck, the rest of our departments suffer. We need two salt trucks, which would be another \$750,000. Unfortunately, we are in a position where we have only had needs and have never gotten the wants. We are trying to balance that out a little where we can do our needs and our wants.

Mr. Morgan commented I just looked at my tax bill and 58% went to the schools, which is good, 14% went to Stow, 28% went to Summit County. Mr. Wren stated that our main revenue source is income tax not property tax. Mr. Morgan stated that the citizens of Stow are subsidizing a lot of Summit County. Mr. Crawford commented I am not sure how comparable we are to Cuyahoga Falls but the Natatorium and the water works, I would imagine, makes them a decent amount of money. Mr. Wren stated that they lose money on those two facilities. Mr. Crawford commented that our Parks and Recreation could probably have a bigger budget even though it would be somewhat subsidized if we had a facility that even though it does not break even it still generates revenue. Ms. Nahrstedt stated that is part of the feasibility study – how you can generate revenue.

Mayor Pribonic stated the average person should not be worried about the amount of revenue being generated but what the Parks and Recreation department brings you is economic development. People would like to see the small restaurants but we are 35,000 people. We are not going to grow past 35,000 – there is no room to grow. Which means we have to bring some people in from the outside to actually go and support these businesses in Stow. Even though it

is not making money for your city, indirectly it is for the simple reason of economic development drive for Stow.

Ms. Nahrstedt asked if there was any part of this summary that anyone wanted to focus on. Mayor Pribonic stated residents have shared that we have explored the possibility of a recreation center before. We have been guilty of that before – we are a very good city of doing surveys. We know what you want but we have to be honest with our residents as far as there is a cost behind this recreation center. Are you willing to bear that cost? We cannot stop at we know what you want and we are going to tell you we do not think it is going to work. The survey stated that the community wants a recreation center. Shame on the city if we do not explore this option, we are doing exactly what has done in the past. People are seeing some tremendous improvement thanks to Mr. Wren and Ms. Nahrstedt, with the new parks and equipment. In order for us to continue, we have to stay in front of that ball.

Mr. Wren stated that we were looking to venture in a combined facility with the Stow Munroe Falls Schools, with our portion being more like a field house. We would have had a few courts and maybe a turf field. The question is would our residents vote for something like that? Probably not because the survey states that the residents want a field house but also a place for adult fitness and programs. Mayor Pribonic stated that we have to look at how this building is going to serve someone who is two or 102.

Mr. Wren stated we cannot turn the Master Plan into a community center study – we need to make sure that we are not just pulling that piece out and only worrying about that facet of the plan. There are many very good ideas that have come out of the Master Plan and we need to make sure we move forward with those ideas as well.

Mr. Morgan asked what role the Parks and Recreation Board would take in these decisions. Ms. Nahrstedt stated you would be part of the process with focus groups and stakeholders for sure. Mr. Morgan stated that we only meet four times a year. Ms. Nahrstedt stated we could meet more than that if needed. Mr. Morgan stated that we used to meet twice a month – the first time was planning the second time was execution to see if the plans had been executed. I am not saying we have to meet twice a month but four times a year is not enough to complete this on time. I almost voted against this plan because I was afraid it would dissipate, as the other ones have in the past. Mayor Pribonic stated that we have aimed at every one of our boards and commissions to make sure that they are involved in the planning and I really am proud of all of our boards and commissions because they are really putting a lot of input in the decision making process, which is helping us move forward as a city. Ms. Nahrstedt stated that when we started the Master Plan, Julie Root and Anne Stirm were on the sub-committee for this and then it moved to Mr. Pontius and Ms. Sheets. A lot of the work is internal and this is hugely an internal document for us to utilize in moving forward.

Regarding SKIP Playground Mr. Morgan, we started with a city center plan to have possibly a splash pad and the new SKIP Playground. We pulled together three boards and commissions; the Parks and Recreation Board, the Senior Commission and the Arts Commission and we had committees that came out of that grouping of people. We met several times and then covid happened -- we had a ton of information. We had playground companies come in, that group did their due diligence with regard to accessibility renderings and so after covid then the staff picked it up internally and ran with a plan based on all of that research that the committees had done prior. The Parks and Recreation Board had opportunities to be involved in that and the

two members at that time were involved. We will be asking for your approval to move this forward to council for their confirmation so if there are changes or things that we need to do, we want to do that.

Mr. Morgan stated that there are about four things that we could not possibly do. They want to turn our campground in to a KOA, Kampgrounds of America, with concrete pads and tents in the woods. Ms. Nahrstedt stated that is not in our plan but is part of the renderings. Mr. Morgan stated that concrete pads are a huge expense and are not needed. We do not want to turn our campground into a KOA. Ms. Nahrstedt stated that putting a new access road and to put pads in has already been discussed. I think it is important to go back and look at the data in the focus groups that gave information on the campground. We also have to listen to campers that we talk to on a daily basis. This year we had to close part of the campground for weeks because of the condition of the sites.

Mr. Morgan stated that zip lines are expensive to maintain, they require a lot of equipment, for example, harnesses and hard hats. You have to have people trained to know what they are doing before they lift people up. Ms. Nahrstedt stated that the zip line is proposed for Adell Durbin Park. Mr. Wren stated that there are actually third parties that come in and operate at these facilities. They lease the land from you and for that; you get a portion of revenue. These companies take on all of the capital costs, all of the employees, the training, safety gear and in return for that, we get 30% of the revenue. Mr. Morgan stated that is good that it is a company coming in and we do not have to provide the employees. Ms. Sheets stated that the key thing to remember with this plan is that these are all concepts. These things are not hard and fast plans. Those are things that we will discuss and maybe we do need to meet once a month and dive in to each part of this. We cannot be stuck on what is on the paper because it is not what is actually happening. To pick it apart before it goes to council – these are just ideas and I think that is the only way we can move forward.

Mr. Morgan asked does the same thing apply to the climbing wall. Mr. Wren stated even if the structure was ours the operation of this would be done by an outside organization because it is specialized. There are climbing walls that are free climb and climb at your own risk but we probably would not do something like this. We would probably have a company come in to oversee it and have a charge that we would get a percentage of. Mayor Pribonic stated that a recreation company has purchased the bowling alley for nearly a million dollars. If they have a climbing wall, we would have to think about if we want to compete in that arena. I would never want to hurt a business that is coming in for recreation. Mr. Wren stated that the Master Plan includes a putt putt course and a sand volleyball court. This is an entertainment portion that was not being served in the community, since Stow Kent Entertainment closed. We are waiting to see if this recreation company does something like that and if so, we will not.

Mr. Crawford stated after looking at the Master Plan, I am not sure how this is all going to be done but then I had to realize that this plan is just concepts and ideas of what can be done in our parks. I am excited about the plan and am in support of it. The only concern I have is making sure that we follow the priorities of the community. I support a multi-generational community center that will serve everyone in the community. Mayor Pribonic stated that we have to get out of the realm of saying our Parks and Recreation program is only nice playground equipment. We have to look at the community center as an economic driver. When people come to our center, they may engage in other parts of our city that affects us economically.

Ms. Sheets asked do we need to approve this plan to present it to Council. Ms. Nahrstedt stated yes. Ms. Sheets stated the feasibility studies will be completed in August. Our next board meeting is not until October. Should we schedule something for the end of the August for the board to get together? Mr. Wren stated that the timeline to present the feasibility study to Council is in November. Ms. Sheets asked do we want to look at other things that are a part of this Master Plan, setting aside the community recreation center. Mayor Pribonic stated that we are past the middle of the year and we have to set a budget by the end of the year. If we decide to set aside a million dollars, we need to know what we are planning to use those million dollars for. This is where we need input from the board. Ms. Sheets asked should we plan to have a monthly meeting starting in September or August. Ms. Nahrstedt stated I think for purposes of the budget we should do something in August. Mr. Wren stated I have to have the capital budget completed by mid-November. Ms. Sheets asked can some dates be sent out that work for you and we can all respond regarding availability. These meetings would be work sessions to dial down on certain topics.

Mr. Crawford moved to approve the Master Plan as a guideline for the next decade of Stow Parks and Recreation, seconded by Mr. Morgan. All were in favor.

Feasibility Study Update – Community Recreation Center

Ms. Nahrstedt reported:

We have engaged a consultant to do a feasibility study for a community recreation center. As we discussed before, based on the results of the survey from the Master Plan, it clearly states that we need to look into a community recreation center. We had a kick off meeting today and I thought it went fabulous. Mr. Wren stated that the company that we chose has done over 800 feasibility studies. This group in the firm all have a Parks and Recreation background. Ms. Nahrstedt stated there would be an opportunity for community input. We will be doing a short, community survey online. We have asked this organization to review more of the Master Plan data so that they can extrapolate that out and ask different questions than what has already been asked. Their recommendation is that we do this quickly, sometime in August and then have results by November.

Mr. Morgan stated that 20 years ago we had plans to build a recreation center. I am not sure if these plans still exist but we had the architect's drawings, had even put it on the ballot, and were voted down twice. I am not sure if that information still exists and we could use that information as a foundation to build on. Ms. Nahrstedt stated that unfortunately that information would not be useful.

Fox Den Golf Course Update

Mr. Wren reported:

We continue to see unprecedented numbers per month. In May, we did the highest month we have done in the history of Fox Den in revenue at \$233,429 and then in June we did \$262,058

and two days ago we were projected at \$324,000 for the month of July and by our projections, we will hit a million dollars on or about July 23. The earliest that has ever happened before was August 6 of last year. At no other time in history have we hit a million dollars before the month of September. We are \$47,000 ahead of last year, which was our highest year ever.

We met today with our golf course architect for the driving range. If you have seen the mountain of dirt, that is for the driving range and other areas. The plan right now would be over the winter we will transport some of that dirt to our future teaching area, which is on the east side of the range and a company that specializes in golf course construction will come in the spring of next year and do all of that work in a smaller area. Then around July 20 of next year, we will close the main part of the range and we will do the entire tee area with new elevations and new target greens. We will need to have somewhere for our high school teams to practice in the fall. We will not be able to open up the main part until May of 2024 because it takes that long for the grass to take root. At the same time, we will be quadrupling our existing parking.

As far as the overall property, I just spoke to our Assistant City Engineer and we will be getting a survey done for the entire property. We have taken down about 7.8 acres of trees for the future cemetery and we had a clump of trees in the back of the driving range, where we kept losing golf balls and revenue so we also removed those trees.

Mr. Crawford asked if the patio was finished. Mr. Wren responded all of the posts coming out of the pillars have been wrapped in aluminum. Wiring for the lighting and the fire pit are being done now. This will all be controlled by remote or have it on our phones. Once that is completed, construction of the pergola will begin. A few months ago, we bought all new furniture for around the fire pit.

Parks Maintenance and Improvements

Mr. Wren reported:

Now that the grass is not growing, it is a good time for us to catch up on all of our projects. Both Sherwood and Northport playgrounds are completely installed. We are still having an issue with seasonals. We are up to 1 ½ currently and usually we like to have five or six. It is impossible to find people and we are paying double what we paid 4 years ago and still cannot find any help.

Programs & Events Update

Ms. Nahrstedt reported:

I think you are all aware of what we have been doing. We were happy to get past the parade and thought it was a fantastic day. The learning curve from not having done it since 2019 was huge. When we did the parade in 2019, that was the first time we staged it at the Target parking lot. One of the key things I think is that we kept it short. We did not have as much interest as we have had in the past, which was fine. We limited every single entrant that wanted in to no more than two vehicles. From where I stood at the review stand after it was all staged, it was an

hour going by there, which is a good amount of time to view a parade. There were some gaps but I feel the parade was lively and interesting.

We are past all of our Celebrate Stow events and we thought we had good participation and people seemed happy. The Fun in Stow Play Day was a hot day and I wish it was better attended but we executed it well. We will evaluate what we do with a signature event during that time of year other than the parade, and we are always open to anyone's ideas.

We are meeting with the library on August 2 to discuss more programs that we can collaborate with them on.

LIBRARY REPORT

Mayor Pribonic asked how is the survey going for the library. Ms. Malthaner stated that as of yesterday we had 1,300 responses – people are passionate about telling us what they want in their library. We had hoped to get 2,500 total responses but if we get more than that, we will just keep going. All of the paper responses I have to tabulate but we will get an update every Friday afternoon. The most important part is the focus groups. We are trying to get community members at one of two community focus groups on July 26. This will be very in depth. We are trying to find out what will bring in the people who do not visit the library. The people who are responding to our survey now are the library lovers. If anyone would like to be a part of the focus group, we would love to have you.

Ms. Malthaner and Ms. Rome gave a brief update on what is going on at the library, with the focus being on the library community survey. In order to view the presentation, click on the link below.

<https://tinyurl.com/3hvv797m>

PLANNING COMMISSION REPORT

Ms. Sheets reported:

The facility at Adell Durbin was presented to the Planning Commission for approval, which it was approved. There was also discussion on having railings on the stairs going down to the tennis/pickleball courts – many people felt that this was something that needed to be addressed.

OLD BUSINESS

Mr. Morgan asked if there was going to be anymore neighborhood pop up events. Ms. Nahrstedt stated that we are planning one in Wyoga Lake Estates on August 4. The pop up event in Calls Farm was very well attended. Mr. Morgan asked is this an event we will continue to provide. Ms. Nahrstedt replied yes, we are planning to continue these events. Ms. Malthaner stated that this was the perfect example of a feel good event – just made you feel good to live in Stow. Mr.

Crawford stated I like seeing us going out into the community instead of having people come to an event.

Ms. Nahrstedt stated that we are in the middle of revamping our website with Civic Engage. Mr. Crawford asked when is the estimated roll out date of the new website. Ms. Nahrstedt stated it should roll out in October.

Mr. Morgan stated the Stow Historical Society Harvest Fest is approaching. We have decided not to use food trucks and will be using the kitchen to distribute meals. We have decided to extend our hours to 10:00 am-4:00 pm on September 24 and 25, with the Corvair car show on Sunday. Could we please have this information put on the website and social media? Ms. Nahrstedt stated yes, we would make sure it is publicized.

NEW BUSINESS

Mr. Crawford stated when I was at one of the Concerts on the Green I saw the bricks next to the restroom and was wondering if there is a plan to do something with those bricks that I assume are from when the first SKIP Playground was built. Ms. Nahrstedt stated we do have a plan to do something with the bricks.

Mr. Crawford asked are there wild life proof receptacles that we could replace all the old trash cans in the parks with. Ms. Sheets stated I think that is a great idea and we should look into that. Mr. Crawford also asked about the benches at the Safety Village. One of the plastic coverings on the benches is cracked and if you sit on it the wrong way, you get pinched. Those benches have plaques on them from the Lions and Kiwanis groups. Can we reach out to them to ask if they would like to donate to new benches? Ms. Nahrstedt stated that we could reach out to those organizations but we will probably just replace them ourselves.

GENERAL DISCUSSION ITEMS

Nothing to report.

ADJOURNMENT

Motion to adjourn was made by Mr. Morgan and seconded by Mr. Crawford at 5:30. All were in favor.

Bob Pontius, Chairperson
Parks and Recreation Board

Deanna Mihalus, Secretary
Parks and Recreation Department