

PARKS AND RECREATION COMMISSION
Thursday, Oct. 19, 2023 7 p.m.
ARC Meeting Room, 1701 W Ash

DRAFT MINUTES

Commission Present: Dan Devine, Ted Farnen, Sue Davis, Meredith Donaldson, Chad Henry, Brendon Steenbergen

Commission Absent (excused): Paul Morrison

Commission Absent (unexcused):

Staff Present: Gabe Huffington, Zach Nikin, Tammy Miller

CALL TO ORDER

The meeting was called to order at 7 p.m.

AGENDA

Director Gabe Huffington asked the Commission to add a special item to the agenda, commemorating Meredith Donaldson leaving the Commission. The item will be after the minutes. Agenda was approved as amended on a motion by Farnen, seconded by Henry. Motion passed 6-0.

MINUTES

Minutes were approved on a motion by Davis, seconded by Donaldson. Motion passed 6-0.

SPECIAL ITEM

Huffington told the Commission that Donaldson had notified staff that she is moving from Columbia to Kansas City, resigning her seat on the Commission. She is unable to attend the November Commission meeting, so this will be her last meeting.

Donaldson has served more than 14 years on the Parks and Recreation Commission.

Devine presented her with a card and certificate for a heritage tree, to be planted in the park of her choice.

Donaldson said she was sorry to leave and that she had appreciated her time on the Commission. She loves the parks and trails system and said she has enjoyed being an ambassador for the department. Donaldson thanked the staff and other Commissioners.

MONTHLY REPORTS

The Commission reviewed the August recreation monthly report, which was not completed in time for the September meeting. The August recreation report was approved on a motion by Donaldson, seconded by Davis. Motion passed 6-0.

Park Services Manager Zach Nikin shared these highlights from September: maintenance spent 607 hours on shelter and restroom cleaning and 831 hours on sanitation and recycling; Golf and Athletics Turf spent 140 hours on field setup; Horticulture spent 290 hours on mulching, spraying and cleaning beds; and Forestry spent 112 hours on tree removal at Lake of the Woods.

Recreation Services Manager Erika Coffman is attending another meeting; Director Gabe Huffington shared these highlights in her absence: total participations increased by 80,000 from this point last year; total sessions increased by 2,000; outdoor field usage increased; youth sports increased drastically; and golf also increased.

September monthly report was approved on a motion by Farnen, seconded by Henry. Motion passed 6-0.

PUBLIC HEARING

Gans Creek Recreation Area improvements

Devine asked staff for a presentation.

Huffington described the project which would be installation of a playground adjacent to the concession/restroom facility, installation of two 20' x 20' shelters at the cross country facility, construction of a 7 to 8 mile natural surface trail designated for hiking and biking, and installation of a 20' x 30' shelter, LED lighting and additional parking at the east roundabout. Total budget is \$380,000 from the Park Sales Tax, donation from the Frank W. Morris Memorial trust (construction of the trail) and donation from the Columbia Trail Association (design of the trail). Huffington shared information about the public input process as well as noting that submitted comments were provided to the Commissioners. Some of the parking was reduced based on input.

The proposed trail will utilize park land on the north and south side of Gans Creek. A professional trail design/construction firm with membership in the Professional TrailBuilders Association will be retained to do the work. This ensures proper design and minimizing erosion by utilizing best practices for trail benching, switchbacks, climbing turns and stream crossings. Four miles of trail would be green level for beginner friendly hiking and biking. Three to four miles would be blue level for more experienced riders. The goal would be to host National Interscholastic Cycling Association (NICA) competitions. Huffington said the trail would be a great spot for recreational mountain biking, trail running and hiking; a great location to host the department's new program Women Everywhere (WE) Hike.

Huffington addressed the environmental concerns that some have raised.

A heron rookery management plan would be in place that would include a 200-foot buffer around the heron rookery, no construction allowed in that area (designated on a map) during the nesting season from February through August and no large hiking or biking special events allowed in the that same timeframe. Huffington said the plan is supported by the U.S. Fish and Wildlife service and the Missouri Department of Conservation.

For the creek crossing, a hardened crossing will be used to cross Gans Creek. It would be the same location that the previous landowner used to cross the creek with trucks, equipment and farm implements. Parks staff has discussed the creek crossing with the Missouri Department of Natural Resources and the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers and there are no issues with the construction of the trail or the creek crossing.

Huffington said design plans will be shared with neighboring Rock Bridge State Park (MO State Parks staff) in regard to the Gans . They will discuss whether a connector is needed for hiking only, timeline for construction and mutual approval on any signage.

Staff has also discussed a natural resource management plan with Missouri Department of Conservation staff. The development of the trail would provide access for staff and volunteer groups to address the increasing amounts of invasive species. There would also be opportunities to do native tree plantings and reforestation.

Huffington showed the Commission how the master plan for Gans Creek Recreation Area has progressed, by reducing sports fields from 13 lighted sports fields and 26 parking lots to 5 unlighted sports fields and 7 parking lots.

Devine opened public comment.

Beth Kelly said she was representing the Columbia Track Club. She described the the group as being for all ages and abilities. Trail running is a growing sport and Columbia can make an impact, she said. Trail running and hiking is open for all but can be difficult to get into because current options in Columbia are flat while Rhett's Run is too much of a challenge for some. She said the proposed trail would be a nice addition to the City and she supports it.

Will **LAST NAME**, told the Commission he is a member of the CoMo Raptors, local mountain biking team. He said the new trail would be an opportunity to host races for participants from all over the state. He said it is fun to compete in cities like Warsaw and Jefferson City and he would love to be able to show off Columbia to fellow racers. The sport unites participants who all love mountain biking.

Marla **LAST NAME**, is also a member of the CoMo Raptors. She would like to get more younger kids involved and said a new trail in the middle of the state would help. She thinks it would be a great addition to the community.

Mike Burden, is a coach of the Raptors. He is in in his fourth year and described the size of NICA, which has teams in 32 states with more than 20,000 kids racing. Locally, the Raptors had 35 racers last year and grew to 48 this year. He said this trail would help their organization adhere to the core values of NICA, which include inclusivity and equity, bringing the opportunity to mountain bike to everyone. There are participants that ride Rhett's Run at Cosmo for the challenge, but that trail is difficult and can be discouraging, he said. Burden also cited the economic impact that a mountain bike race could bring to Columbia if a trail could be built to host such events. He estimated about 500 families would come, staying in hotels and eating at local restaurants to help boost the local economy. Burden said five states that border Missouri participate in NICA and Columbia has the advantage of a central location. Burden concluded by mentioning that Raptors youth also would volunteer to help maintain the trail and do honeysuckle abatement. He said this trail would give them the opportunity to get outdoors and help develop a love and appreciate for nature and the outdoors. He fully supports the project.

Lelande Rehard spoke on behalf of the Columbia Trails Association (COMOTA). The group was founded in 2018 and advocates for building and maintaining trails. They have formed partnerships with many groups, including Parks and Recreation, and assist with clean up and maintenance. Rehard said COMOTA had 400 volunteer hours in 2021 and 550 hours in 2022, namely improving trail drainage, silt, picking up litter and removing invasive species on area trails. He said COMOTA is supportive of both the green and blue trails and added that the green option would be great for adaptive cyclists. He welcomes the Commission's support.

Dee Dokken, is from the Sierra Club which comprises 1,000 members. She said the natural area at Gans is very precious and people are generally respectful. However, she said running and cycling is not respectful, and those uses would increase trail erosion. Dokken said just walking would cause erosion. She said the upper trail would likely be fine but the south trail

would damage the riparian corridor. She said she is pleased there are no ballfields at Gans, but that doesn't mean there should be mountain bikes. She commended parks staff on the decrease in lighting at Gans and said she likes to see the lights being cast downward, but said she would like to see a red spectrum LED being used there for lighting. Blue is more harmful to animals and people, she said.

Dokken said the heron numbers have dwindled at Gans. She believes if this project happens, she will be coming back in two or three years to say the numbers have decreased even more. She commented that U.S. Fish and Wildlife and the Department of Conservation are not as concerned about herons since they are not endangered, but the local population loves them and it would be a loss to Columbia. She would like to see a buffer of 650 feet rather than 200 feet. She is happy for the timeframe in place that would not disturb the rookery from February to August. Dokken concluded by saying the trail that was originally proposed in the master plan was a very different trail, and this was a big change.

Kevin Roberson is president of the Friends of Rock Bridge State Park. He said COMOTA is a great organization and he is not against having a beginner trail for mountain bikers. He is against the southern trail because it is in a creek buffer area set aside for no development. He said it was set aside in the previous master plan. Roberson said Gans Creek was designated as an outstanding resource waterway and it is important to take all steps necessary to protect it by not allowing mountain bikes in the creek. He said he is not against NICA or mountain bikes but is asking to protect the natural area.

Jason Patrie spoke in favor of the trail and talked about the benefits of NICA, such as skills and instilling confidence in the youth that participate. He said he has a six-year-old daughter who looks up to the group and is looking forward to joining them. A trail like this one that has a beginner option, would help foster interest and get the younger kids out there to help them get experience and confidence. He said this project combined with another trail Woodpecker Hollow on greenbelt land would offer the chance to make kids feel more equipped with mountain biking.

With no more public comment, Devine closed the public hearing.

Farnen made a motion, seconded by Davis, that the Commission recommend approval of the Gans Creek Recreation Area improvements to City Council.

Devine invited Commission comment.

Henry said he had faith that Parks and Recreation staff would do a good job in completing the project, as they have in the past.

Donaldson said she initially had concerns about the proposal on the south side, but after hearing all proposed safeguards and with a great staff and use of professional contractors, she is supportive of the project. She is excited about the prospect of getting more youth out participating in outdoor activities in the park. Donaldson said this trail would offer a chance at more programming and educating hikers on environmental impact and care of the outdoors.

Parks can provide all sorts of opportunities to children who may not otherwise have them, she said. Donaldson said she had some hesitation but she trusts park staff.

Farnen asked about lighting at the roundabout?

Huffington said staff have done blue spectrum lighting but they would take a look at it and reconsider.

Farnen asked if there was a requirement for a buffer with a rookery, or if it is voluntary on our part?

Huffington said there are some in terms of nesting seasons, but this is mainly voluntary.

Farnen then confirmed with Huffington that there would be no special events planned there from February through August.

Devine asked about dogs on leashes?

Huffington said there are no plans to have dogs off leashes in this area.

Steenbergen asked about signage?

Huffington confirmed that there would signage placed with policies for use of the area.

Devine commented that he has been on the Commission a long time and seen many completed projects, some that had opposition. He can't say enough good things about the long history of great park projects, citing the Harmony Bends disc golf course and the Gans Creek Cross Country Course, both of which are nationally renowned. He pointed out that Gans originally was meant to be mainly athletic fields but staff identified a need and effectively switched gears. He has a lot of faith that when staff says they will do something, they will actually do it.

Steenbergen agreed, saying that staff has always been respectful of nature, park users and athletes that use the facilities. He has observed staff always accommodating feedback as much as possible and listened to public input, although it is not possible to please everyone all the time. He believes this project will be done as respectfully as possible.

With a motion on the floor, the Commission voted 6-0 in favor of recommending approval of the Gans Creek improvements to City Council.

OLD BUSINESS

Virtual meeting update

Huffington said the equipment needed is all available. Staff is hoping to provide the option for virtual meeting attendance by January. He said he would follow up with Legal to ensure proper steps and procedures.

REPORTS

Council Items

Huffington informed the Commission of recent and future Council approvals:

- Douglass Park improvements
- Hall Trust - Football Improvements - Release, Indemnity and Refunding Agreement
- Missouri Arts Council Agreement - Heritage Festival
- L.A. Nickell Cart Shed Improvements - Fleet Electrification

Bicycle and Pedestrian Commission Report

At the most recent meeting, staff shared updates:

- Perche Creek Trail first phase - awaiting approval from City Legal and Purchasing regarding design-build specifications.
- Trail grading and resurfacing underway for multiple sections of the Bear Creek Trail. Grading/resurfacing for the Hinkson Creek Trail will begin within the next month. Grading work on the MKT, adjacent to the 3M Wetlands, will follow. Improvement work is funded by recent FEMA reimbursement as a result of the June 2021 disaster declaration.

(Commissioner Steenbergen departed).

Capital Project Report

Nikin shared these project updates:

Philips Park pickleball courts, Philips connecting trail and lake trail crossing, MU Health Care Pavilion phase II (ribbon cutting on Oct. 28), Cosmo Park RC track, Bear Creek Trail resurfacing, Forum Nature Area parking lot and Stephens Lake Park (Children’s Grove art).

Recreation Services Report

Huffington shared these updates and event photos:

ARC programs, Adapted Recreation and Sports, Aquatics, Community Recreation Smaller Ballers and Tai Chi, Life Enrichment backpacking and martial arts, Touch a Truck, Yappy Hour, Golf and Sports.

STAFF COMMENTS

Huffington said at this time, there is no urgent business needed in December.

Farnen made a motion, seconded by Henry, that the Commission cancel their December meeting, unless staff deems it necessary. Motion passed 5-0.

Huffington informed the Commission that Cavelle Cole-Neal will move laterally into the newly created Recreation Superintendent position over the ARC and Aquatics. Employees Mark Brzuchalski and Dayton Grover recently announced their retirements.

COMMISSION COMMENTS TO STAFF

Davis thanked staff for adding a sign at the Stephens Lake Park beach parking lot. She thought that had helped prevent drivers from entering the lot and going the wrong way.

PUBLIC COMMENTS

Ken Midkiff spoke to the Commission as a Park Patrol volunteer. He commented on his concerns on “clashes” between cyclists and pedestrians on the MKT Trail. Some cyclists are are traveling at high rates of speed which is leading to problems. Midkiff said he would share his concerns with staff as well.

NEXT MEETING DATE

Nov. 16, 7 p.m. at the ARC

ADJOURNMENT

Meeting adjourned at 8:30 p.m. on a motion by Farnen, seconded by Henry.