

**RECREATION AND PARKS BOARD
OF ST. MARY'S COUNTY
Meeting of Thursday, March 2, 2006**

MINUTES

Board members present: Andrew Roper, Chairperson, Sam Brown, Dorothy Gass, Jody Payne, Robert Richardson and Lisa Wainger Rush.

Board members absent: Coleman Hillman, Patrick Dugan and Robert Harper.

Recreation, Parks and Community Services staff and others present: Phil Rollins, Director, Recreation, Parks & Community Services (RP&CS); Arthur Shepherd, Recreation Division Manager; Kenny Sothoron, Sports Coordinator; and Kathy Bailey, Recorder.

CALL TO ORDER

The Board meeting was called to order by Andrew Roper, Chairperson, at 5:35 p.m. in Room 14 of the Governmental Center in Leonardtown.

APPROVAL OF MINUTES

Jody Payne motioned, seconded by Dorothy Gass, to approve the minutes of February 2, 2006. Motion carried with all in favor.

RP&CS FY07 OPERATING BUDGET DISCUSSION

Director Phil Rollins provided the Board with a packet of information related to Commissioner McKay's response to Senator Dyson's letter of January 9, 2006 requesting that the Board of County Commissioners (BOCC) reduce the property tax rate by 10 cents and consider setting the homestead property tax credit at zero percent. The County Finance Department was asked to provide the fiscal impact of this recommendation and determined that to balance the County's budget and achieve the 10¢ reduction in property taxes would require either an \$8 million reduction in expenditures or increases in revenues. County Departments were asked how the proposed change in revenues could be incorporated into the FY07 budget; the potential considerations for revenues and expenses were provided in the handout. The potential considerations relating to the RP&CS Department include the movement of recreation program administrative staff to the Enterprise Fund. This consideration would increase user fees about 15% to 20% across the board. Mr. Rollins provided a list of current program fees and the increase what would be needed if this request is approved by the BOCC. Commissioner McKay has asked for Board and Committee input by March 31, 2006.

Lisa Wainger-Rush stated that she is concerned with moving positions to the Enterprise Fund; she was also concerned about pricing people out of programs which would, in turn, have the effect of reducing revenues collected and jeopardizing those positions. Andy Roper also did not support the idea of moving positions to the Enterprise Fund. Bob Richardson stated that St. Mary's already has lower property tax rates than Charles and Calvert counties. Chairperson Roper agreed to draft a letter to the BOCC regarding this request; he will e-mail the draft to Board members in advance.

PROJECT UPDATES

Seventh District Park – The project includes a new playground, restroom building, basketball court and expanded parking. Perc tests for the restroom building are scheduled for March 8, 2006. The playground portion of the project was recently awarded to Playground Specialists, Inc.; the new playground will be installed by summer. Staff anticipates that construction on the remainder of the project will be underway later this year.

Three Notch Trail – Phase I construction should be completed during spring and a ribbon cutting ceremony with the BOCC will be held on June 3rd. Construction is expected to begin on Phase II in the summer or fall of 2006 and be completed by spring 2007. Phase II of the trail will run from the Northern Senior Center to the County line in Charlotte

Hall. Chairman Roper asked how the Department was going to handle crossings at state highways in California/Lexington Park. Mr. Rollins stated that users will be directed up to signalized intersections then back down to the trial.

Charlotte Hall Property Master Plan – Master plan work is continuing for the Charlotte Hall property. Senior housing, an indoor recreation/multi-generational center and a swimming pool are all items being considered and are compatible and complimentary to the existing Senior Center. A preliminary plan is expected to be publicly presented on May 4, 2006 at a joint meeting of the R&P Board and Commission on Aging. The meeting will be held at the Northern Senior Center.

MECHANICSVILLE VOLUNTEER FIRE DEPARTMENT REQUEST FOR LAND AT CHAPTICO PARK

Mr. Rollins briefed the Board on the Mechanicsville Volunteer Fire Department (MVFD) request for about three acres of land at Chaptico Park for a future substation. The MVFD provided a site plan for the desired location near the entrance of the park on a current soccer/football practice area. The Department has concerns about the precedent this would set for other organizations that may come to the County looking for land and the loss of the soccer/football practice area. Mr. Rollins expressed these concerns to the MVFD, and they have since suggested adjusting the location to have less of an impact on the practice area. The MVFD volunteered to help clear some land at the park for additional practice areas at the park. An alternative proposal would be for the MFVD to use the parkland on the west side of the adjacent residential property, with access via the park entrance. The BOCC will hold a public hearing on this potential donation in April. If this request is granted, it would have to go through the established Program Open Space (POS) conversion process and the County would need to replace the land with land of equal or greater recreational and open space value. The replacement property cannot be land that is currently designated as parkland.

Barry Lewis, President, Northern Soccer League, stated that he had just recently learned of the request. He stated they have a good relationship with the MVFD and doesn't have any major concerns at this time; but hasn't discussed this with the entire league board of directors. He would like any new practices areas graded and leveled. He did state he was concerned about the hundreds of cars coming in and out of the park on Saturdays and the possibility of a fire call preventing a timely response by the MVFD or impacting the safety of the users of the park.

RAISING COMMUNITY STANDARDS IN YOUTH SPORTS Comments from Volunteer Youth Sports Leagues

Bill Oosterink, St. Mary's Youth Soccer League (South Soccer) – Mr. Oosterink stated that St. Mary's Youth Soccer doesn't typically have too many issues. The league currently requires mandatory coaches training; three hours pre-season and three hours during the season. He stated that RP&CS staff should re-examine the cost estimates for the program; he thinks the cost may be more like \$10 per player. Instead of scholarships, the funding might be better used to fund the cost of the initiative. He felt the cost increase might discourage kids from signing up.

Rich Haggerty, President, St. Mary's American Little League – Mr. Haggerty stated he has the same concerns as South Soccer. The league is trying to keep fees down so kids can play. His league currently offers scholarships to those that can't afford the registration fee. He supports this type of program and his league has had very few problems. Little League requires Positive Coaches Alliance training for coaches. The league has been doing background checks for the past four years on coaches and volunteers (last season they conducted 250 background checks). He stated the league is already doing a lot of what's being proposed.

Don Sirk, President, Northern Girls Softball League – He stated that he hears what these folks are saying and can't argue their point. His league goes from 3rd grade up to 12th grade; the league has experienced problems with the older girls and their parents. League coaches go through the NYSCA training, but it's still difficult to deal with problems. Supports the proposed crisis intervention plan and stated that consistency in "what we are all trained on" would be good. He was not sure how many coaches should receive the training. He stated there is value to the proposal and thinks it should be discussed more. He was not sure if just the basic background check that anyone can do on the internet is enough. He stated that "it's important that we give serious consideration so some of these proposals."

Chris Maher, President, St. Mary's National Little League – Supported what Rich Haggerty, St. Mary's American Little

League said. Little League already does much of what is being proposed. When the league has problems they have ways of dealing with them before they get out of hand. They do background checks; he was curious about the fee for background checks since Little League does them for \$1.50 per volunteer. He stated that smoking and code of conduct policies are excellent ideas, but are completely unenforceable. Little League has a code of conduct that is provided to parents; but they are not required to sign the form. He felt about 99% of parents adhere to the policy. Little League is a non-smoking league (no tobacco of any kind); how do you ask those behind the back stop not to smoke? He stated that his league has had excellent support from Recreation and Parks and is extremely happy with the relationship with staff. He appreciates the opportunity to comment on the proposal. Thinks some parts of the proposal are beneficial; but some parts still need to be discussed.

Buster Williams, President, Babe Ruth Baseball – Mr. Williams stated that the other two baseball leagues covered everything he wanted to say.

Barry Lewis, President, Northern Soccer League – As the other leagues mentioned, Northern Soccer League also requires training for coaches. He is concerned about the additional work the proposal will require of the volunteers; they are volunteers and are stretched thin now. He stated this might be a heavy handed approach to require some things that may not work. Feels it's unfair to force this on everyone because of one incident. He doesn't know what the solution is, but he doesn't think the proposal will guarantee that problems won't occur. He thinks the proposal needs more thought.

Recreation and Parks Board Chairperson Andrew Roper clarified that the proposal isn't in response to one incident, as it was first proposed in late 2003 to help prevent problems before they occur.

Pam Hageman, Commissioner, Girls Lacrosse League – Girls Lacrosse has only been in existence for about 2 ½ years. Everyone involved in the organization brings high expectations for the program. They have a parent code of ethics that is printed on the back of the registration form; they also have a coach's code of conduct on the coach's application form. Problems are addressed quickly when they arise. Coaches and assistant coaches know that they will be evaluated each year before being asked to coach again. League coaches have mandatory training and must join the National US Lacrosse Association. They take a web based coach's course on-line at their own expense. The league also offers an annual coaches training. US Lacrosse has an agreement with the Positive Coaching Alliance to provide training and all coaches must participate in that training. The league now has 14 teams and 37 volunteer coaches.

Trude Kemp, Treasurer, Pigskin Football and Cheerleading – Ms. Kemp stated that Pigskin Football has conformed to a lot of the things included in the Raising Community Standards program for years. "We as a League and Board think it's a great thing." They have parents sign a code of ethics, they do the NYSCA coaching certification (she stated she is certified through NYSCA to provide the training), and do criminal background checks on the coaches. They have incorporated the cost of these things, while still maintaining a low registration fee. "Unfortunately, it's not a panacea of stopping all bad adult behavior." Those parents who participated in the incident at Fifth District Park in November signed a code of ethics. She agreed that the coaches training and expectations set make a difference. She stated it's a great initiative; but is costly. Could we all use a little bit of financial assistance to make sure nothing slips through the cracks – yes, we could use that. Again, the smoking ban will be tough to enforce. Leagues and Recreation and Parks should get together to see what our choices can be to help enforce some of these things. But overall, she said it's a great initiative.

Chairman Roper thanked all those present for coming out and sharing their thoughts on this proposal. Mr. Rollins also thanked the leagues for their input and commended all the volunteers for the work they do. He stated that the County needs to be able to tell the public that all the leagues are taking the same protective measures to help prevent negative behavior; while nothing can guarantee that negative situations won't happen, these measures can help reduce the chances of them happening in the future.

SCHEDULING OF NEXT MEETING

The next meeting of the Recreation and Parks Board of St. Mary's County will be held on Thursday, April 6, 2006, at 5:30 p.m., in Room 14 of the Governmental Center in Leonardtown.

ADJOURNMENT

The meeting was adjourned at 7:25 p.m.

Kathy Bailey, Recorder

Minutes approved by the Recreation and Parks Board on April 6, 2006.