



In attendance: Chair Cynthia Loebenstein, Vice Chair Michael Mertaugh, Amy Segal, Ana Lagunez, Dory Waxman, Jon Kachmar, Marie Gray, Nathan Robbins, Zack Anchors, Shaylyn MacKinnon, Maya Lena and Jaime Parker. City Staff: Ethan Hipple, Alex Marshall and Samara Ray

City of Portland
Parks Commission Strategic Planning Meeting Minutes
February 18, 2021
5:00 PM

On Feb 18th 2021 the Portland Parks Commission conducted a virtual meeting using emergency legislation approved by LD 2167; 1 M.R.S. §403A, that authorizes cities and towns to conduct meetings online. This meeting was conducted remotely using Zoom.

I. 5:00pm 5:15pm Welcome Game Two Truths and a Lie

A virtual hug and farewell was given to Dory Waxman. This is her last meeting because her term as a Commissioner has ended. A few members of the commission shared a bit about themselves in the game called Two Truths and a Lie.

II. 5:15pm 5:25pm General Discussion and Background Information on MOU

Cynthia shared that Portland has quite a range of friends groups. She said the discussion tonight will be whether there should be a general Memorandum of Understanding (MOU) for friends groups. The findings of this meeting will go to the finance sub-committee and they will add it to the Friends Handbook. Ethan shared that Portland has an array of people that are passionate about parks. He said the Parks Department needs Friends Groups. He works with them daily and they bring many resources to the parks. He gave a handful of examples such as the Friends of Lincoln Park helping to restore the Parisian fountain and the Friends of Deering Oaks investing tens of thousands of dollars in playground equipment and the commissioning of the Great Black Hawk statue. He noted the list of groups is quite extensive. Friends groups add immeasurable programming and value to Portland Parks. Many of these efforts are guided by MOU's. He estimates there are 15 dedicated Friends Groups in addition to many neighborhood associations. Cynthia shared that tonight's discussion will be limited to dedicated friends groups. Presently there are only a few MOU's and there is not a blanket MOU for all friends groups.

III. Group Discussion on MOU:

a. 5:25pm 5:40pm Mission

· Does the Friends Group (FG) have a mission that protects and improves a Park?

Michael stated that it would be good for friends groups to formalize some best practices. Ethan stated that to him, a friends group should represent a broad group of users and to make sure the mission of the group is not the mission of a special interest group. Cynthia said if there was an MOU then the mission would be inclusive of all users and it would protect and improve the park. Part of the reason for this discussion now is to professionalize and define friends groups so they

represent all users of a park.

• **What should the PC do if the FG mission is not compatible?**

Cynthia clarified that if we decided to enter into a MOU with a friends group then we would expect that they have a mission that is inclusive of all users and that its mission is to preserve, protect and enhance the park. The idea is that the Parks Commission would encourage friends groups to represent all users of a park. A general MOU would professionalize the relationships between friends groups and the City.

• **Does the FG have a Master Plan?**

Michael thought we should encourage Friends Groups to develop and focus on their Master Plans and to follow the sequence to create a Work Plan. Jaime mentioned that encouraging a Master Plan (or organizations plan) is great but groups should not be penalized if the group has not developed an official plan yet. Amy shared that Ann Pringle wanted to address the fact that one size does not fit all in terms of Friends Groups and this should be taken into consideration. Marie asked for clarification on when is a Master Plan to be developed. Ethan clarified that the City can initiate a Master Plan but that they are often initiated in conjunction with a friends group.

• **Should the FG be asked to develop Work Plans that are to be agreed upon with the Department of Parks Rec & facilities?**

Could there be a way to develop Work Plans for friends groups, agreed upon by the Parks Department, that reflect the priorities of the Master Plan? Cynthia said a Master Plan can be useful in getting a big picture for a Friends Group and then from there a Work Plan can be developed. Work plans should be developed in conjunction with the Parks Department.

b. **5:40pm 5:55pm Representativeness**

• **What constitutes a FG?**

Is a friend group committed to the broad interest of the park or does it have a special interest? What is the interest for the friends group? What could be offered to them? Are there any incentives? What's in it for the City and the friends group? Could there be a subset of friends groups that is a model for others to aspire to?

• **Do FG need to be a nonprofit?**

If a group is not a non-profit, Amy sees that it could be an advantage for them to have an MOU with the City, since the City could help them potentially connect with another group as a fiscal agent to raise money. Jaime mentioned that in some cases the Parks Commission acts on behalf of smaller parks that either don't have a friends group or is just beginning.

• **Which FG's need an MOU?**

There are cases where it is hard to find consensus within a friends group on a specific issue. The Parks Commission needs to work to find out what the friends group is representing and if it aligns with the will of all its constituents. If we have general policies, it could make it easier to reduce controversies over what interest the friends group has.

• **Why would a Friends group want an MOU?**

A MOU would allow for better communication with the Parks Department. It would help identify roles and responsibilities of the friends group and Parks Department. Jaime says if the City and the friends group are willing to sign an MOU, then they are stating they will work together and improve communication. Nathan would like the Parks Commission to consider a shared resource model, but agrees there are benefits of an MOU in terms of increased communication.

c. 5:55pm 6:10pm Accountability

· Should FG's be asked to provide financial reports to the Department of Parks Rec & Facilities? How often?

Michael stated that some Friends Groups may be raising funds to improve the parks but end up using the money for overhead instead. Would a MOU provide accountability for the use of these funds? The National Park Service requires financial reporting and auditing for friends groups within the National Park System. There are not many examples of this requirement for smaller municipalities. Do we feel it would be helpful for Portland or counterproductive? From a donor perspective, it could be helpful to have financial transparency in how friends groups are using funds.

· If FG is fundraising, how much can be used for FG overhead vs direct park improvement?

Cynthia asked if financial reporting could be set for friends groups who have large annual budgets.

· Should there be any limitations on solicitations for fundraising?

Fundraising money for Capital Improvement Projects already goes through the Parks Department.

· Is financial reporting necessary if the FG is not raising money?

Commissioners mentioned they do not want to overburden smaller friends groups with this type of reporting. Ethan shared he has those same concerns, as it is a time-consuming process. It could take away from other Park projects

IV. 6:10pm 6:30pm Conclusion and Next Steps

When there is a significant project involving a large amount of fundraising, a formal MOU makes sense, but does it make sense to have a general MOU? What is the criteria? A cookie cutter MOU would be easy, but it seems like a tiered approach is preferable since customization is desired. Is there another way to get the same result? Amy shared that Anne Pringle brought up the idea of a Partnership Agreement. A Partnership Agreement could have a tiered approach and it could be diagrammed in the Friends Handbook. With a Partnership Agreement there would be no enforcement or barriers, but it would communicate mutual intentions. The next step would be for the Finance Committee to take these ideas and add it to the Friends Handbook.

V. 6:30pm Adjourn

Michael made a motion to adjourn. Nathan seconded. Passed unanimously, meeting adjourned.