



In attendance: Commission Members: Chair Cynthia Loebenstein, V. Chair Michael Mertaugh, Zack Anchors, Amy Segal, Ana Lagunez, Caitie Whelan, Dory Waxman, Jon Kachmar, Marie Gray, and Nathan Robbins. City Staff: Ethan Hipple and Alex Marshall.

City of Portland
Parks Commission Minutes
September 3, 2020, 5:00 pm

On Thursday, September 3, 2020, at 5:00 pm, 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. General Citizen Comment Period

Mark Lesperance wanted to thank Portland Trails and City of Portland staff for the work done at Baxter Woods over the last few weeks. He asked about Davey Tree's work in the park. He also asked about the health of the pond and the status of the bird study.

Ethan stated that Davey Tree is spraying to treat a hemlock woolly adelgid infestation and he will check on whether they are putting signage out. He also shared that there are plans to improve the outdoor classroom in the park and the spring/summer bird study is nearing completion. The cause of the algae in the pond is unknown but will be looked into.

II. Agenda Items

a. Acceptance of Meeting Minutes:

Marie moved to accept the meeting minutes of August. Jon seconded. Dory abstained. Motion passed with eight in favor.

b. New Business

i. 46 Western Promenade License Agreement

Tom Zack, owner of 46 Western Prom, requested that the commission approve a license agreement allowing him to maintain an encroachment on city-owned land so that he can move forward with selling his property.

George Rheault stated during the public comment period that a one-time \$1200 license fee does not seem adequate given the cost of parking in Portland. He also said the city should look into selling the land because it may not be useful in any meaningful way as park land.

The commission shared concerns about the equity of the agreement as presented and requested that the exhibit provided be updated to reflect the current site plan. Commissioners would also like to see the original 2013 arrangement.

Jon motioned to delay consideration of the agreement until after Corporation Counsel has a

chance to address the concerns brought forth. Marie seconded. The motion passed unanimously.

ii. New Parks Conservancy Volunteer Coordinator, Jesse Billingham

Jesse Billingham gave an overview of the volunteer program he will be overseeing. He is currently identifying areas within the parks where volunteer events will be most useful.

iii. Fall Service Event in Lieu of Strategic Planning Meeting

Cynthia shared that since there will be no strategic planning meeting, she would like to have the commission take part in a volunteer work day with Jesse on October 15th.

c. Communications/Updates

i. City Operating Budget Update

Ethan said that the Parks, Recreation, and Facilities department has lost a lot of revenue so about 30 positions were cut as well as programs such as the 62+ recreation program.

ii. Deering Oaks Update

Ethan said that city staff is still maintaining Deering Oaks regularly. Some of the people staying in the park are helping staff with cleanup. The Health and Human Services department has convened a group of social service providers and other City departments who discuss efforts being made to help the homeless population in the park. Portland Police have made multiple arrests.

Anne Pringle stated during the public comment period that the injurious behaviors can't be tolerated in the park. She said that the problem is caused by people not having a place to go during the day and that there is a disproportionate burden placed on Portland to support the homeless population. She also does not want overnight camping to be decriminalized.

Marie said that this is a flagrant abuse of a public asset.

Zack shared the homeless services resource guide developed at the Green Space Gathering.

Caitie asked that as we continue to work on and think about this complex issue that we maintain a spirit of neighborliness, equity, and compassion. She asked that we remember the humanity of these individuals and recognize that the behavior of one individual should not be transposed across all.

iii. Subcommittee Reports

Park Initiatives: Continuing work on signage highlighting a more diverse history. Caitie is researching two abolitionists who had connections with the Portland waterfront. Amy and Zack are looking into Wabanaki history.

Community Outreach: Plan to work on a welcome packet for new commissioners and would like to develop better materials for friends groups.

Annual Report: Received information on the Parks Department from Alex and would like to add a section for the Parks Conservancy. Plan on getting a draft together in the next few weeks.

Finance: Did not meet.