Parks Commission
Meeting Minutes
May 4, 2017, 5:00 PM
City Hall ~ 389 Congress Street ~ Room 24

In Attendance: Commission Members: Diane Davison, Chair, Dory Waxman, Vice Chair, Carol Hutchins, Jaime Parker, Meri Lowry, Michael Mertaugh, Nathan Robbins, Steve Morgenstein, Travis Wagner and Councilor Belinda Ray. City Staff: Sally DeLuca, Ethan Hipple, Bill Needelman and Alli Carroll. Also, the general public including Lucas St. Clair.

Diane called the meeting at 5:03 p.m.

She began the meeting by saying that it is a very exciting time for the Parks Commission. Today they have a very inspiring and hefty agenda. Diane then took a moment to honor Travis, since he will be unable to attend his final June meeting as a member of the Parks Commission. Everyone gave him a round of applause as Diane presented him with a present: a book titled "Bold Visions."

I. General Citizen Comment Period

No public comment.

II. Agenda Items (*public comment taken on action items only*)

A. Acceptance of Meeting Minutes April 6, 2017

Dory motioned to accept the meeting minutes of April 6, 2017. Councilor Ray seconded. Diane said that there is a slight revision to section B, Michael and Craig should be added. Meri added that there are a few spelling errors that she will forward to Alli. Diane asked if all were in favor to accept the minutes as adjusted. Passed unanimously.

B. Revision to Meeting Minutes February 2, 2017

Diane mentioned that there were a couple of typos that were missed in the previous month. Alli and she had gone over them and adjusted/highlighted them for other Commissioners to follow easily. Diane motioned to accept the minutes as adjusted. Belinda seconded. Passed unanimously.

Jaime entered the meeting at 5:08 PM

C. Election of Chair & Vice Chair – June

Diane began by saying that the Commission had changed the election to June during the February meeting, so now that it is our next meeting, would anyone like to nominate the chair? Dory would be honored if elected to Chair this Commission. Diane asked for nominations for Vice Chair. Travis nominated Jaime. Jaime would love to but wanted everyone to know that he terms out next year.

Michael entered the meeting at 5:10pm.

Diane asked if anyone else was interested. No one said anything. She then made it known that if anyone else would like to nominate someone for Chair or Vice Chair, they could make it known between now and June.

D. New Business

i. Recruitment Committee Report - Travis

Travis began by saying that anyone can bring their resume to City Council and become a member of the Parks Commission. The Recruitment Committee met with candidates and forwarded their names and credentials to the rest of the Parks Commission. There were three that were forwarded. It is important to Diane to fill the shoes of Eastern Prom in the Commission now that she is terming out. Jaime asked if there were four or three seats available. There are four seats available. Belinda asked if anyone has been in touch with the nominating committee and knows how many candidates applied? Dory said that she heard there were six.

ii. Potential Funding to Portland Urban Parks – Lucas St. Clair

Diane introduced Lucas St. Clair. He thanked everyone for having him. Lucas then continued by explaining his process to get to this point of wanting to create a Parks Foundation for the City of Portland. He said that this has been a thought for the past six months. He explained that the parks of every great city are as great as the universities, museums, etc. People give greatly to those institutions. Parks get overlooked. If you step back and look at what the Parks do, they benefit other organizations and the community. Lucas spoke about how he reached out to his friend who started the Chicago Parks Foundation. He said that this foundation ended up being the philanthropic arm of the parks in Chicago. They worked very hard to raise money but made sure not to take over the City's responsibilities. Instead they added to it. Lucas understands that, in Portland, there are different enthusiasms for different parks. As a Father of two young boys, he recognizes the importance of all parks and therefore would like to equalize our Portland parks. This desire is what brings him to the Parks Commission. Lucas' would like to the Foundation, City, Parks Commission and Friends Groups to work in alignment. There should be an independent board or something of that nature that had a formal relationship with the City created by drafting a charter that the Council approves. The Foundation would like recommendations from the City on how to move forward as they would like this to be a public private partnership. Ideally the board would be filled with people who are not necessarily strong in parks. The key is networks, fundraising and a strong responsibility with making the parks up to par with museums, universities, etc. Lucas then turned the conversations to the Commission and asked for their opinions and concerns.

Councilor Ray began by stating that she is thrilled because we love our outdoor spaces. She is very excited that someone wants to create a philanthropic arm to make these parks as amazing as they should be. A formal City relationship is necessary but bringing the staff, Friends Groups and Foundation together is a great idea. She also loves the idea of bringing everything up to par with the museums, universities, etc. because this is why people come to Portland.

Michael said that this is a very exciting concept. Eager to see what we can make happen. He mentioned programming and info structure and then asked if Lucas had thought about the standard of maintenance. Michael would like to see these standards raised. He is wary of funds that are meant to be additional ending up being substituted for what is budgeted. He wonders how Lucas plans on insuring the additionality to improve the quality and functionality of the parks. Lucas replied by stating that he agrees that the additive piece is very important. From discussions with the Chicago Parks Foundation and the National Parks Foundation, lobbying the government may be an option. This and creating an influence could be one of the boards roles.

Jaime thanked Lucas for putting so much though into this idea. He is very excited. He added that the City tends to think of parks in nontraditional ways. He used Congress Square Park as an example because it can be used for many different types of programming. It is also a small parcel that has had a lot of great energy. That park is really thought to be part of the actual square and the museum across from it. The City should have more opportunities to be additive and to expand our thought on open space.

Steve thanked Lucas and mentioned that he was a bit sorry to be leaving the Commission at a time when this is starting. This is something they have been working towards for a long time. He did mention that the Friends Groups in Portland differ. Some are more developed than others. Travis added that part of the City's problem is that there are so many parks and so few developed Friends Groups. Doing the inventory this year really opened their eyes to how many parks there are and it is very difficult to keep up with and support all of them. The Parks Division works very hard but it is doubtful that they will ever have sufficient staff to get all of that work done. Lucas explained that there are a great amount of parks but there are opportunities to make this happen. Portland Trails for example has great fire power and the Trust for Public Land is looking for a new Executive Director so there could be new positive change there. They really need to establish the understanding of who uses the parks and how they are used.

Dory added that people want to do and be a part of things. Congress Square empowered many people to be a part of the parks. Many want to help but don't know how sometimes. There has been a large gap between public/private partnership. During this year's Strategic Planning Meeting we were talking about just that, so it is really serendipitous that you are here.

Sally said that the Parks, Recreation & Facilities Department has been together for a little over a year now. Before, when she was the Recreation Director, the Parks Commission held a fort for parks when there wasn't a fort to hold. The Parks Commission held their ground while the Parks Division grew and that is why Lucas is here tonight. The National Parks and Recreation Foundation is helping Sally do some research and they are looking into building this relationship with Lucas' Park Foundation and including Michael Goldman.

Lucas ended the session by stating that this is a very difficult and challenging project that includes a lot of work. He thanked the Commission for having him. Diane thanked him for coming and added that this is the moment the Commission has been waiting for.

E. Old Business

i. Communications/Updates

Amethyst Lot Update – Bill Needelman/Sally Deluca

Bill Needelman, the Waterfront Coordinator with the City of Portland took the next few minutes to discuss the plan for Amethyst Lot. Along the back wall of the meeting room was a projected presentation of the before and after plans for the area.

He began with the before slide and discussed its issues. One being the Ocean Gateway parking lot. Also, Sail Maine has only used temporary structures because they are only there for a month to month lease. That parking lot is attended vehicle only parking. Moon Tide Park original structure failed, so it was filled with rip rap.

Bill then switched to the current proposal for Amethyst Lot. He mentioned that this is the teaser. Stantec consultants are working on the concept plan that we expect will have a lot of vision over time. This is the start of the conversation. This idea will be bounced off of the Planning Board, Parks Commission, The Portland Company Complex, etc. We wish it to be a very active place. It should bring the community right out to the water. The water's edge is improved with seating brought to the water. Charter Boat Access will be a place for the community to view Ft. Gorges. The marina will expand and there will be a larger place for more public birthing. Moontide Park will also expand to become a much more utilized space for events and incoming cruise ship guests. It could include tide pool playgrounds, landscape features, art, etc. It could be an exciting open space. It will also be resilient. It will be at a higher elevation level. Hills will also be on Moontide Park. In preparation for a future significant storm, this would help protect our community.

Nathan entered the meeting at 5:45 p.m.

This proposal will be rolling out on May 25th at Ocean Gateway. This has been a thought for the past twelve years, so this is a very exciting time to be looking at this. Meri asked why is this project moving now after twelve years? Bill replied that a lot of development and recognition has been coming to this area and there has been an increase in cruise ships. This is the front door to Portland from the ocean. Michael said that it is a very interesting outline, thank you. He asked if impact fees were being considered for this. Bill said that that is an excellent suggestion but they are currently asking consultants to create a funding bucket. Stantec has more waterfront experience and knows more about this. Nathan questions what the increase in elevation was for the vegetative buffer acting as wave protection. Bill replied that right now it is about 10 – 11 feet above sea level. They are looking to go as high as 14 feet and 21 feet for structures. Dory asked what the timeline looks for this. Bill answered by stating they are currently at the end of the concept development process. Next year there is CIP money to bring us to a higher level of design and permitting.

Travis mentioned that he didn't know Moontide Park was a park. It is not on the inventory list. Ethan replied by saying it is on the list to be designated. Dory asked Bill what the cost analysis was for it. He simply responded, very expensive. Nathan asked, if all of the funding isn't obtained, are their critical components that will be focused on. Bill said the Sail Maine Program, community boating, decent view and the enjoyment of water. They continued to discuss the possibilities of events, weddings, and pure enjoyment that could be had in this area. Everyone then thanked Bill for his efforts and the presentation.

ii. Committee Reports

Annual Report & Inventory Committee - Travis

No Net Loss Policy – vote

Travis presented a no net loss policy four months ago and thought it was all set, but Michael presented an alternative. Sally asked if Travis would just amend it. He said that he wouldn't want to amend it because Michael's is significantly different. Everything he is saying isn't necessary. Michael said that his comment was really based on whether we have the right to do what this is. If we don't have the right to do this then it could be counteractive. Dory asked if this was more of a question for Corporation Council. Travis said no, because the Parks Commission Chapter 18 Ordinance says that we are an advisory group. This is a policy that shows how we value the parks. Nothing would happen to the ordinance because we would just provide advisement. Sally said that the Parks Commission is advisory to the Land Bank Commission and then if the Land Bank says no, then it doesn't go anywhere. She kind of understands what Michael has to say because this policy may be tying the hands of future Commissioners. Meri suggested that the Parks Commission should plan this for a time where we can discuss this at length. If the Parks Commission is to be an effective advisory body, then we should be aligned with the City Council. We should reflect a way of partnership. She agrees with Michael and that it is counterproductive. Jaime thinks the intent is good and that he likes something definite to point to if someone came with a proposal. He suggests that the language could be tying future hands and implying a mandate that we do not have. Diane asked the Commissioners if they would stay longer to come to a conclusion. All agreed. Sally said that it could cause some unintended consequences. I thought the Parks Commission had a great recommendation for Peppermint Park. It was honest and open. It was a good collaboration. Ethan said there are at least four layers of protection for land. 1. City, 2. Parks Commission, 3. Land Bank Commission, and 4. City Council. He does not have a huge problem with the policy but maybe Land Bank is a more concrete place to have it.

Jaime excused himself at 6:34 p.m.

Michael said that he thinks that it is within our right to adopt approval. Travis said that Jaime did point out the wording, so the phrase "the prerequisite" was not his intent. Michael said that they should make it clear that we will consider all proposals. The Commission will take all criteria, one being the Offset Policy. Meri pointed out that the other criteria isn't written. She believes that it would reflect poorly on the Commission if we took a criterion that wouldn't hold up. Diane asked if Article 7 under the Parks Commission rules would be an appropriate place to put this. Steve added that he believes the Commission would be opening a can of worms if they have one written but not the rest. Nathan suggested that it is evaluated every so many years so that it doesn't completely tie the hands of future Commissioners. Michael is worried that focusing on this would open the doors to trades. Let's be grateful to those protections that we have. It shouldn't be under impression that we are willing to trade parks. Dory pointed out again that the Commission is only advisory. She suggested scratching "the prerequisite." Sally asked if you're already doing this, why are you writing it down? Travis replied by saying that they want to be able to provide this to people and to be more transparent and fair. Ethan said that individual members are able to vote however they would like, so why create criteria?

Diane made a motion to adopt the policy with "the prerequisite" eliminated.

Travis seconded.

Meri added that Travis has been clear, but she is concerned about how it reflects on the Commission. She believes they should have a more functional approach. Steve asked where this would show up. Diane said it would be in the Commission rules. Dory said again, maybe this should be sent to Corporation Council. Meri agrees.

Diane asked all in favor? Only Diane, Dory, Travis, Carol and Nathan in favor.

Travis made a motion to send the policy to Corporation Council. Dory seconded.

All in favor? Passed unanimously.

Diane adjourned the meeting at 6:59 p.m.