

**COUNTY OF SAN MATEO**

**Parks and Recreation Commission Meeting**

**Thursday, October 6, 2016**

**4:00 p.m.**

**Board of Supervisors' Chambers**

**400 County Center, Redwood City**

**MINUTES**

Vice Chair Meda Okelo called the meeting to order at 4:00 p.m.

**1. Pledge of Allegiance**

**2. Roll Call**

Commissioners Present: Barbara Bonilla, Michael Cooney, Neil Merrilees, Meda Okelo (Vice Chair) (left the meeting at 5:15 p.m.),

Commissioners Absent: Marico Enriquez (Chair), Kevin Huo (Youth)

Staff Present: Marlene Finley, Parks Director; Sarah Birkeland, Assistant Parks Director; Brenda Bennett, Executive Secretary; Scott Lombardi, Parks Superintendent; Ed Hallett, Harbormaster; Eduardo Castillo, Administrative Services; Ramona Arechiga, Natural Resources Manager; Michele Laskowski, Resource Specialist; Sam Herzberg, Parks Planner; Carla Schoof, Community Programs; Gabriella Navarro, Intern, Nirit S. Eriksson, Deputy County Counsel

Vice Chair Okelo noted that he would need to leave the meeting at about 5:15 p.m.

Commission Action: M/S Cooney/Merrilees to designate Commissioner Bonilla to chair the meeting after Vice Chair Okelo's departure; passes 4-0 with Commissioner Enriquez and Youth Commissioner Huo absent.

**3. Public Comment**

- Juventino Flores, Siena Youth Center Bulldog Riders, expressed appreciation for the Parks Shuttle serving East Palo Alto and Menlo Park, Redwood City with weekend service to Edgewood and Wunderlich Parks.
- Aaron Gonzalez, Siena Youth Center Bulldog Riders, thanked Parks for providing the weekend shuttle service.

**4. Presentations\***

4.1 Watershed Access – Tim Ramirez, SFPUC

Tim Ramirez, Director of Natural Resources, Water Enterprise, San Francisco Public Utilities Commission, made a presentation entitled "Peninsula Watershed Education and Recreation." He highlighted the 23,000 acres originally purchased in 1930, now owned and managed by the SFPUC, that contains significant watersheds, designated fish and wildlife refuge, federal scenic and recreation easements administered by the Golden Gate National Recreation Area, and also is included in the UNESCO Golden

Gate Biosphere Reserve. He discussed the goals of the Peninsula Watershed Management Plan, adopted in 2002, and the intent of the Water Enterprise Environmental Stewardship Policy, adopted in 2006. He noted the existing trails of 31 miles and pursuit of three new significant trail projects, 11 miles additional. He discussed the current trail management for visitors to the Bay Area Ridge Trail (Fifield/Cahill) using docent-led groups and a proposal to move to an annual permit system coupled with an extension of the Bay Area Ridge Trail. He emphasized that existing and proposed future operation of the trails needed constant balancing with drinking water and ecological protection goals.

Responding to Commissioner questions, Mr. Ramirez said that they would do a cost analysis for trail management and educational and docent services.

Public Comment:

- Matthew Self said he was a San Mateo County resident and encouraged asking the SFPUC to do an analysis of expanded watershed access.
- Sidney Liebes provided staff with a copy of the letter he had prepared that expressed his concern that proposals for public access to the 19,000-acre Scenic Easement portion of the Crystal Springs Watershed did not appear to be in conformity with the intent and terms of that Easement. He provided history related to the realignment of I-280 outside of the Watershed and an outcome of that contentious matter that actions by the SFPUC and the San Francisco and San Mateo County Boards of Supervisors regarding public access to the Watershed were obliged to be in conformity with the terms of the Scenic and Scenic and Recreation Easements.
- Charlie Krenz, Open the Watershed, said he had presented previously to the Commission on the group's desire for expanded watershed access.
- Catherine Apsley said she supported increased access to the watershed and encourage establishment of a permit system to accommodate.
- Bern Smith, Bay Area Ridge Trail, expressed support for the SFPUC plans to extend the Ridge Trail.
- Lennie Roberts, Committee for Green Foothills, provided a two-page handout entitled the "Protect the Watershed Campaign." She said in 2002 the SFPUC considered allowing unrestricted access to Fifield-Cahill Ridge in the western, remote area of the watershed. Due to many different organizations' concerns about potential public impacts about this that the SFPUC adopted a policy allowing access to Fifield-Cahill Ridge through a docent program. She suggested the SFPUC take action to affirm protection of the water supply and preservation of natural resources as the primary functions while increasing public access through an expanded docent program.
- Andrew House said he supported opening the watershed.
- Marshall Dinowitz, Sequoia Audubon Society, said the opening of the west side of the watershed would not be in the public interest.
- Christine Corwin, Save Our Recreation, said the group has 10,000 members that both promote recreation while protecting resources. She said they encouraged the Commission and Board of Supervisors to support expanding access to the watershed.
- Mike Ferreira, Sierra Club, said that the proposed expanded docent system was

the best approach environmentally.

- Tommy Hart said he supported watershed access through a permitting process. He said he liked solitude and did not need a babysitter in nature.
- Christopher Brousseau, Open San Francisco Watershed, said that the watershed needed to be opened to correct social injustice.

#### 4.2 Parks Visitors Study – Nina Roberts, San Francisco State University

Dr. Nina Roberts, San Francisco State University, reported on the visitor study conducted for County Parks to determine why visitors use the parks and what the obstacles to visiting parks were. She explained the methodology used to develop the survey including the use of four focus groups in Daly City, North Fair Oaks, East Palo Alto and Pescadero and questions posed to those groups. She said the survey occurred from April 25 to June 5 at various parks and at various times noting that during survey periods visitors were counted and afterwards survey takers were sent a follow-up survey. She reviewed the emerging themes of the focus group results and provided a breakdown of the survey results including a summary of respondent demographics, site comparison as to race and home language spoken, and reasons for visiting. She said 98.7% of the respondents said the overall quality of experience of visiting parks was “good” or “very good” and that 95% felt safe visiting parks.

(Vice Chair Okelo left the meeting at 5:15 p.m.)

Dr. Patrick Tierney, SFSU, they looked at the impact of potential daily park pass price increases on current visitation and camping fee price increases on current camping levels and reviewed that information with the Commission.

Ruby Turalba, SFSU, said the study also provided respondent suggestions to improve experience and that the survey data could be used to identify parks/sites with the most urgent needs. She noted some of the recommendations made were to improve information and communication, signage, break down transportation and communication barriers, develop a positive presence in the parks and community, expand activities, programming and services, plan for additional facilities and infrastructure, and assess current fees and costs.

Commissioner Cooney asked about funding the improvements suggested. Dr. Roberts said part of that was engaging in partnerships with other organizations. Dr. Tierney noted that the study found support for a level of fee increases and suggested that information might be used for finding a balance point.

Commissioner Merrilees said he was impressed that so many people had a good experience. He said the recommendations were not cost intensive and he preferred not increasing fees. He said the study would help with future initiatives.

Acting Chair Bonilla said that this was good information and thanked the presenters.

Public Comment: Rafael Avendano, Siena Youth Center Bull Dog Riders, asked when the report would be accessible to the public.

Dr. Roberts said she would send the report to Mr. Avendano.

**5. Parks Director's Report**

5.1 Budget Report

Director Finley thanked the SFSU staff for the report. She said they would use the data to update the Strategic Plan and budget priorities. She said staff had already met to look at the Strategic Plan and consider priorities for the 2018-2020 budget. She noted the Budget Report that was included with the packet.

**6. Action Items**

6.1. Review and Approval of Minutes of August 4, 2016 Meeting

Commission Action: M/S Merrilees/Cooney to approve as presented; passes 3-0 with Commissioners Enriquez and Okelo not in attendance.

6.2. Review and Recommend to the Board of Supervisors to Waive Park Vehicle Entry Fees for Veterans

Director Finley made a short report noting recommendation for approval was being requested.

Acting Chair Bonilla asked for public comment; there was none.

Commission Action: M/S Cooney/Merrilees to recommend to the Board of Supervisors approval of waiver of park vehicle entry fees for U.S. Military Veterans; passes 3-0 with Commissioners Enriquez and Okelo not in attendance.

**7. Parks Foundation Executive Director's Report**

Michele Beasley, Executive Director, reported that the Foundation was eager to partner with Parks on the suggestions made in the Visitors Study. She noted the success of their Office Warming event, a shared table at Bicycle Sunday with REI and future plans in 2017 for other events with REI, no Tour de Peninsula in 2017, promotions for volunteers, and supporting Creekside Center for Earth Observation on reintroduction of the Bay checkerspot butterfly.

**8. Commissioner Reports**

Commissioner Cooney reported on the first Dog Management Committee meeting. Commissioner Merrilees noted he had been visiting dog parks in the County related to the Committee's work.

**Adjournment**

The meeting was adjourned at 5:40 p.m.