

**SOLANO COUNTY PARK AND RECREATION COMMISSION
MINUTES OF THE MEETING OF
July 14, 2016**

**County Administration Center - First Floor Hearing Room
675 Texas Street, Fairfield
10:00 A.M.**

Members Present: Commissioners Alvarez, Whited, Leong, Riddle and Chairman Hermsmeyer

Members Excused: None

Staff Present: Chris Drake, Parks Services Manager, Resource Management, Diane Gilliland, Resource Management

1. Call to Order and Roll Call

Chairman Hermsmeyer called the meeting to order at 10:00 a.m. A quorum was confirmed.

2. Approval of the Minutes

The minutes of May 12, 2016 were approved as prepared (motion by Commissioner Whited, second by Commissioner Leong).

3. Approval of Agenda

Commissioner Alvarez suggested that agenda item 7c., Regional Park Update, be moved ahead of item 7a.

The revised agenda was approved. (motion by Commissioner Leong, second by Commissioner Whited)

4. Chair and Commissioner Comments

Commissioner Alvarez reported that a local monthly magazine called "Benicia" featured a picture of Lake Solano Park in a recent edition with a section called "Shake Up Your Routine With A Fun Summer Picnic".

5. Public Comments

There were no public comments.

6. Commissioner Outreach Reports

Chairman Hermsmeyer stated that he had received a notification from California Fish and Game that it is proposing to change the size of the barrel in which Hag fish are caught to a more uniform size.

7. Status Reports:

C. Regional Parks Update

John Bliss and Maria Garcia-Adarve of SCI Consulting Group gave the Commission an update on the Solano Regional Park Plan. To date SCI has met with County staff, Solano Land Trust, Solano Regional Parks Subcommittee, Solano County LAFCo, and the Tri-City & County Cooperative Planning Group.

Mr. Bliss stated that the creation of a regional park district has three major steps: selection of the type of government; finding funding source(s); and implementation. Regarding the selection of the type of government there are templates that can be used to set up a regional park district. One is called the Regional Park and Open Space District Act. SCI recommends it as their first choice for Solano County. It is a template that any jurisdiction can use to set up a regional park district. There are two flaws with the Act for Solano County. The first is that it is set up as an independent special district such as the East Bay Regional Park District. SCI has received direction that the Solano Regional Park District should begin as a dependent district and the current Board of Supervisors should be the governing authority.

SCI has also received direction that for political palatability the proposed district should not have the right of eminent domain. The existing Act includes the right of eminent domain. SCI encourages the County to spend six months to a year to get special legislation from the State to create a dependent structure that can be triggered to become independent at a future date and exclude the right of eminent domain. SCI believes that in 25 to 50 years the County will be better served by a stand-alone, self-funded independent parks district. The special legislation has advantages such as not needing signatures and not having to go thru LAFCo. The County has a legislative advocate who, with a senator or assembly member in Sacramento, would walk the special legislation through the process.

Securing funding is the second step. County Parks currently operates with a budget of approximately 1.2 million dollars. The district could be set up as an independent park district starting out with that same 1.2 million dollars. He suggested testing the waters for an associated funding mechanism. The creation of the district will most likely require a vote of the people and he suggested bundling it with a funding mechanism.

Public support for a Park District in Solano County needs to be measured. Mr. Bliss recommended that the County conduct a very specific survey to measure support for a yearly parcel tax. A popular model is a simple straightforward parcel tax at a very low rate such as \$6.00 per parcel per year. He gave an example of a parcel tax of \$10.00 per year that would yield \$1,000,000 that can be added to the existing 1.2 million from the County. If the survey finds there is support above two thirds SCI would recommend that the County bundle the parcel tax with the new district. Using the funds for public outreach, improved access and maintenance would be a priority. SCI proposed that the new district be promoted as lean and light; operating on a very tight budget while delivering more access to open space areas.

If there isn't enough support for a tax funded district they would recommend starting the park district as a "paper district" with a new name, approximately the same funding and staff and check again for public support in a few years. Without a tax funding mechanism the new district would not be in a position to acquire more park land. But he noted that Solano County does have large open space areas where a park district that works well with existing large land owners, as our current Parks Division does, could have a partnership that allows access to more land.

The type of district and how it is paid for are typically things that can be figured out through surveys and research. The implementation of the plan may be the hardest part. SCI feels that it is not going to be easy to implement a tax funded regional park district because there doesn't seem to be strong emotional enthusiasm for it in the county. The Commission noted that a gas tax (road improvements) and measure AA (Bay Area wetland restoration & habitat protection) were defeated recently by Solano County voters.

Implementation would require the County to dedicate consultant and staff time to do the needed outreach efforts over a long period of time. It could take six to eighteen months to get everyone onboard and buy-in from the agricultural community, user groups, city councils and Board of Supervisors. On top of that there would need to be outreach to the general public. The Commission described the challenges faced in past efforts to create a park district in Solano County. They also noted that a good portion of the campers are people who live outside the county. County residents tend to use park facilities for day use activities and to access local waterways for fishing and other water sports.

A. Attendance and Revenue Summary

A midyear adjustment increased the projected revenues across the board by 9% with the exception of Lynch Canyon. Mr. Drake reported that the adjusted amounts had been exceeded by an additional 19% (Lake Solano) and 7% (Sandy Beach). Based on initial projections they were budgeted significantly lower so they are actually at 121% of projected revenue.

B. Park Closures

County ordinance directs that the Commission be notified of any park closures (fire related or capacity related). Ranger staff can close a park for safety reasons or necessary for the safe operations of the park. There have been no red flag closures so far this year. The red flag warnings are called by local fire districts. Lynch Canyon is the primary park that is subject to red flag warnings. A potential issue is that sometimes a red flag warning can be called for Lynch Canyon but not for Newell Open Space. A suggestion was made to have the fire chief for Lynch Canyon communicate safety concerns with his counterpart in American Canyon during red flag warnings.

Capacity closures are called when the parking lots are full. When parking is at capacity the camping, day use and beach areas are full and safety becomes an issue. The users in the park are not vacated but no one else is allowed in. If a parking space becomes available the passengers of that vehicle taking the open spot are allowed in. The average closure at Sandy Beach is around 11am to noon on weekends. The park closure sign is at the entrance to the park at Montezuma St. where there is enough room for vehicles to turn around. During the peak season Parks has contracted with the Sheriff's Office for coverage on weekends.

8. Confirm Date of Next Regular Meeting, and Adjourn (Action Item)

The Commissioners agreed by consensus to a regular Commission meeting on September 8, 2016 in its regular location, at 10:00 a.m. in the County Administrative Center, 1st Floor Hearing Room. Meeting was adjourned at 11:28 a.m.