

MEETING NOTES
CITIZENS COMMITTEE FOR PARKS AND RECREATION SERVICES
MARCH 15, 2012 - 2:00PM

Kent County Commission Board Room (Room 310)
County Administration Building

Committee Members Present: Sandi Frost Parrish, Rebecca Rynbrandt, John Schneider, Andy Johnston, Andy Guy, Rich Houtteman; Brian Donovan; Rosalynn Bliss; Mike DeVries; Jason Zylstra; Sue Thomas; Doug Wustman;

Staff Present: Roger Sabine, Kent County Parks Director; Mark Fitzpatrick, Ada Township Parks Director; Charlie Ziesemer, City of Kentwood Parks and Recreation Director; Megan Streeter Walker Ice and Fitness Fitness/Training Manager; Mary Kay Sherman, Walker Ice and Fitness; Assistant County Administrator Mary Swanson and Kent County Management Analyst Jennifer DeHaan

Meeting Notes:

Welcome & Introductions -. Kent County Board Chair Sandi Parrish thanked everyone for being at the meeting. Parrish stated that at the last meeting the consultants presented their initial findings and subsequently conducted several focus groups with members of the committee to gain their input regarding next steps and possible recommendations. Today, Kerry Laycock, Barbara Heller, and John Kazcor will be presenting their recommendations and next steps.

Approval of the Meeting Notes – A MOTION was made by Ms. Thomas and supported by Mr. Wustman to approve the meeting notes for January 19, 2012. The MOTION passed unanimously.

Parks Study Update: Kerry Layock provided a brief review of their findings which included the following:

- The parks and recreation systems throughout Kent County are good, but not great.
- Access to parks and recreation programming is within national averages (parks somewhat above, recreation somewhat below).
- Over the past few years, a number of parks and recreation agencies have faced significant budget reductions.
- The parks and recreation agencies throughout Kent County operate efficiently.
- Consolidation of the parks and recreation agencies and services does not appear to have the potential to provide significant cost-savings or efficiencies.
- There is no shared vision for parks and recreation services; yet there is a strong commitment and reliance upon the fact that parks and recreation systems support a high quality of life for residents.
- At this time, it is not recommended to pursue a countywide millage due to the lack of a shared vision and potentially competing priorities between agencies.
- Creation of a platform to enable joint planning and shared visioning would provide a benefit to all agencies individually and the community as a whole.

Based upon these findings, Laycock stated that there are number of opportunities and recommendations to move the parks and recreation systems in Kent County from good to great which includes the creation of a multi-jurisdictional authority to support parks and recreation services. In addition, this group could be charged to implement a number of high-value and high-priority projects that would benefit multiple agencies including implementing common metrics, coming hiring system, joint marketing, and developing a web-portal to showcase the parks and recreation services throughout the County. Laycock stated that the Authority could be organized under Public Act 321 which authorizes Recreational Authorities or under the Urban Cooperation Act. Laycock provided additional details regarding the governance structure and next steps which are included in the powerpoint presentation which is posted online.

Andy Johnston asked if the community would be able to leverage “new” dollars by developing the Authority. Laycock stated that funders generally are more supportive of collaborative initiatives rather than those that are not. Mark Fitzpatrick stated that somewhere in the report we need to be sure to capture that there are additional services that are provided by the private sector and churches that support a strong parks and recreation system. In addition, Fitzpatrick noted that some of these recommendations can be moving forward in coordination with the Authority. Laycock stated that while they could, having a good, strong leadership will definitely help to move the recommendations forward and that it will help to leverage additional resources and help to develop a shared vision and to prioritize services.

Rebecca Rynbrandt stated that the study identifies that there is a population of special needs individuals that are underserved in Kent County. She asked what the immediate need for an Authority is? Laycock stated that the Authority will provide the leadership to help our communities continue to move in coordination with one another rather than competing with one another for resources and programs. Parrish stated that the Authority could provide a vehicle to develop the vision for our parks and recreation services so that we can all be moving together in a similar direction.

Andy Guy stated that being assessed as average is not acceptable and that not fixing something which is broken is also not acceptable. He stated that moving forward with some shared vision is beneficial to the community. Rosalynn Bliss stated that she was a little disappointed with the recommendations and was expecting something more bold. Laycock stated that we shouldn't be disappointed with the recommendations as the parks and recreation systems throughout the County are operating efficiently, they are well-managed, but challenged by declining resources. Laycock stated that this study was not the study to develop the shared vision to establish the bold objectives but to get an understanding of the “state” of our parks and recreation services throughout Kent County, and what would be appropriate to improve sustain/enhance them. He stated that these systems are operating well and given declining resources they are operating efficiently; with the caveat that continued disinvestment in parks will not help the community. Laycock noted that this is the starting point for the next steps to move forward and to develop that shared vision and to identify our community priorities for parks and recreation services and use that coordination and synergy to leverage dollars and implement projects that will have multi-jurisdictional benefits. The creation of an Authority will provide the mechanism for communities to work together to develop that shared vision and to be in a position to pursue it.

Andy Johnston stated that while creating another quasi-governmental unit to address some of these issues is not always the best, he sees this as a next step to moving us forward and aligning

our vision. He stated that the shared web-portal with information and registration/reservation opportunities is a great benefit to citizens and to users and that this is one step in moving us toward collaborative not competing interests. Johnston stated that municipal boundaries only matter to the governmental units not to the citizens and that creating this Authority will help market the area better. He stated that under the Authority those communities that want to participate can and those that don't, won't.

Brian Donovan stated that perhaps there is a reason to look at carving out parks as a part of the Authority as it is the more tangible product and more visible product. Rich Houtteman stated that maybe there is an opportunity for some collaboration with the West Michigan Sports Commission and the CVB and that this would be the next layer in the system that will support the delivery of services. Parrish stated that the West Michigan Sports Commission was developed to be an economic driver for this community and to attract tournaments and bring visitors to our community.

Parrish stated that the discussion has been good today and that the consultants will be working to draft their report and recommendations for the committee to review at the next meeting. She thanked everyone for attending today and stated that a new meeting date will be announced soon.