



PARKS AND RECREATION COMMISSION
Minutes of Regular Meeting of August 5, 2020
City Council Chambers, One Twin Pines Lane, Belmont, CA

CALL TO ORDER: 7:02 PM.

ROLL CALL

Commissioners Present: Cotten, Foehr, Fox, Kapur, Lyford, Michaels, Mittelstadt, Sanders

Commissioners Absent: Lee

Staff Present: Parks and Recreation Director Shearer, Administrative Assistant Clark

PLEDGE OF ALLEGIANCE

Led by Commissioner Sanders

COMMISSIONER ANNOUNCEMENTS/AGENDA AMENDMENTS

Commissioner Kapur announced a local food drive organized by the Youth Advisory Committee in coordination with the Boys and Girls Club.

COMMUNITY FORUM (Public Comments)

Deniz Bolbol and Pat CuvIELLO called for the Commission to require speakers to state their residency.

Jason Strnad recognized the contributions of open space volunteers and encouraged the City to continue engaging with various user groups to uphold the quality of the trail system.

CONSENT CALENDAR

July 1, 2020 Draft Minutes

ACTION: On a motion by Commissioner Mittelstadt seconded by Commissioner Foehr, the minutes were unanimously approved with the correction of the spelling of Jennifer Lien's last name (6-0).

ITEMS OF BUSINESS

Library Box Artist Recognition

Director Shearer recognized Noelle Foehr, Dave Poole, Illena Uplekar, Maya Wohl, Ken Leek, Christine Ong-Dijcks, Joe LoCoco, and Allie LoCoco, for their contributions to the library box art program. Commissioner Fox complimented the library boxes and Shearer confirmed no more are currently planned, but the department was happy to work with volunteers.

Open Space Trail Topics

Commissioner Mittelstadt recused himself due to residing nearby the open space.

Director Shearer said the Trail Signage Committee's efforts revealed areas for improvement in the open space. Therefore, she recommended forming a committee to explore some near-term projects prior to the community engagement and analysis of the Parks, Recreation, and Open Space (PROS) Master Plan. Shearer reviewed the trail map's history and volunteer trail building efforts.

In response to Commissioner Michaels, Shearer said other local agencies had resolved similar issues with refined messaging, community engagement, and sometimes policies. Shearer clarified she had not asked other agencies if their policies were influenced by resident only or regional input. In response to Commissioner Fox, Shearer confirmed the committee would be comprised of Commissioners and staff.

Public comment was received.

- The following people expressed their appreciation for mixed trail use: Anthony Aveggio, Jack Pien, Kevin Sullivan, Thaddeus Block, Nate Yeakel, Matthew Blain, Lynn Bell, Jason Strnad, Andrew Elliott, Zoe Downing, Don Clark, Michael Chin, Roger Del, Esther Thomas, Rob Anagnoson, Jonathan Carter, Thomas Switzer, Steve Welter, Scott Hansen, Gene McKenna, Norbert Demanuele, Melissa Viotti, Aram Maravillas , David Paulsen, Andrew Kunz, Loren Thomas, Chris Westra, Matthew Love, Chuck Spiteri, David Tognotti, Tom Snider, Warren Nishikawa, Kevin Byrns, Mark Sichlinger, Claus Enevoldsen, Richard Sequeira, Liz, Matt, Ellie, and Jack Green, Frank Spiteri, Basil Moutsopoulos, James Snider, Sani El-Fishawy, Paul Lattik, Janette Wernick, Scott Hill, John Newdick, Andy Belk, Dave Evans, King Tang, Erick Burton, Paul Sheng, Brian Combs, Ray Viotti, Brad Wilson, and Adam Rodriguez.
 - Suggestions included: consulting the California Mountain Biking Coalition (contact: Matthew Blain), Silicon Valley Mountain Bikers, and the Mountain Bikers of Santa Cruz; utilizing bells, signage, and public education to reduce conflict; uniting user groups for discussion and shared volunteer days; trimming back plants at blind corners; providing more structure to park traffic flow; reviewing trail design to reduce erosion; banning e-bikes; providing transparency in the decision-making processes; and using the PROS Master Plan to direct policy decisions.
 - Other comments included: not all Belmont Heights residents agreed with statements made by the Belmont Heights Civic Improvement Association Board of Directors on this topic, anti-biking comments came from a vocal minority and were not supported by data, the park provides a safe place for kids to ride, learn good values, and bond with family; various user groups typically get along; there is a great sense of community; reckless bikers are the exception; COVID-19 has increased trail use; bikers have contributed extensively to trail maintenance; people who travel for mountain biking spend money in local stores; few parks on the peninsula allow mountain biking; mountain biking provides low-impact exercise; trail damage is due to heavy rainstorms and trail design, not bikers; trail erosion is caused by all forms of trail use; night biking is quiet, improves neighborhood safety, and is helpful to people who work odd hours or have families; e-bikes are great for older or physically limited bicyclists; speed limit signs are not necessary; there has not been a decline in wildlife; Water Dog offers some of the best biking trails in Northern California; Belmont Parks & Recreation's Goal Policy supports shared trail use; and gratitude for keeping the open space accessible during COVID-19.
- The following people expressed concerns about mountain biking on some or all trails: Deniz Bolbol, Diane Boross, Lisa Bigly, Kristin Mercer, Coralin Feierbach, Adele Della Santina, Kenn and Bobbie Lebovitz, Shelley Frost, Gladwyn d'Souza, Frank Zang, Hamid Motamed, Eleanor Mercer, Frank Mercer, Barbara Posch, Mimi Iversen, Ken Lien, Bill Kurtz, and Ed Mitchell.
 - Concerns included: steep, dangerous trails being built by bicyclists without authorization; bicyclists using the park for extreme sport putting the City at risk; bicycling adversely impacting trail quality, wildlife, and vegetation; the 1998 trail map approved by City Council designating a number of newer trails as single-use pedestrian-

only; multi-use trails being dangerous for those with mobility/visual/audio disabilities; night riding increasing; non-resident bicyclists ruining the open space; bicyclists riding too fast down narrow trails and not yielding to other users; bicyclists are not wearing face coverings and being verbally abusive at times; unauthorized jumps and berms posing a safety risk; and mountain biking becoming more popular while more local trails are being closed to them, exacerbating issues at Water Dog.

- Suggestions included: signage/education; banning all bikes; banning motorized bikes; temporarily banning bikes with a threat to ban them outright if behaviors don't improve, prohibiting bike use except on the fire road, designating a few trails as bicyclists-only, having staff enforce policies; and installing cameras for enforcement.
- The following people were concerned about unauthorized trails: Jennifer Lien, Deniz Bolbol, Diane Boross, Kenn and Bobbie Lebovitz, Maryam Kamali, Barbara Posch, and Mimi Iversen.
 - Concerns included: trails not on the 2005 trail map not being legitimate; excessive trail density; “illegal” trails being built; City liability for reckless behavior on unauthorized trails; and trails cutting nearby private property.
 - Suggestions included: provide more sanctioned trails and close all unauthorized trails.
- The following people were concerned about closing any existing trails: Melissa Viotti, Paul Lattik, Tom Snider, and Ray Viotti.
 - Concerns included: proposed trail closures were paths used by deer and closing trails would exacerbate user conflicts.
 - Suggestions included: formalizing semi-official trails and expand trails.
- Resident Pat CuvIELLO clarified his comments during Community Forum were not intended to imply non-residents couldn't enjoy the open space—just that Belmont voices should drive policy decisions.
- Other concerns included: a lack of policy enforcement; issues with dog waste and trash; topics should be discussed publicly as part of the PROS Master Plan rather than within a committee; the open space was designated as a “preserve,” not a “park;” people have been swimming in the lake, and people are walking/riding on the wrong side of trail.
- Other suggestions included: increasing fuel reduction, conducting an environmental study, and presenting committee topics in a public forum.

Commissioners shared their comments.

- Commissioner Michaels thanked the public for their comments and expressed support for a committee to conduct outreach and collect data to feed into the master planning process; however, he specified the committee should not establish policies. Michaels said open space priorities should be: (1) conservation, (2) safety of people and animals, and (3) general enjoyment. He emphasized the fact that funding sources must be identified to successfully implement and/or enforce policies.
- Commissioner Foehr said everyone wants to protect the open space, so there is lots of common ground to explore. She thought the committee's scope was reasonable and said it would be helpful to address some topics ahead of the PROS Master Plan such as safety concerns.
- Commissioner Fox said it was helpful to hear the community comments and she thought action was needed sooner rather than later. She emphasized committee transparency.
- In response to Fox, Shearer advised that the committee disband when the master plan begins to avoid Brown Act violations. Commissioner Michaels suggested some (thoughtful) overlap with the PROS Master Plan due to limited time.

Commissioners Cotten, Foehr, Lee, and Kapur were appointed to the Open Space Topics Committee.

Parks, Recreation, and Open Space Master Plan Update

Director Shearer said ten proposals were received, five firms were interviewed, and the final two had been selected. Commissioner Michaels thanked staff for ensuring an efficient virtual interview process.

Resident Deniz Bolbol requested a list of firms who responded to the request for proposals (RFP) and asked what the committee was looking for in a firm. Commissioner Lyford said he was looking for a firm that understood Belmont's unique issues, had experience with Bay Area open space, and could bring people together. Commissioner Mittelstadt looked for previous experience developing master plans and said all five interviewed firms could do the job. Commissioner Michaels was looking for a firm who would conduct a city-wide gap analysis and who had thought through virtual public outreach.

Fiscal Year 2021 Parks and Recreation Department Budget

Director Shearer said the numbers presented were what City Council had approved, however mid-year adjustments would reflect the impacts of COVID-19. The department was maintaining revenue wherever possible (including Camp SOAR, the Community Learning Center, and some contract classes), however facility rentals had suffered. Shearer confirmed park maintenance and projects had continued and said she would keep the Commission apprised of future budget changes.

In response to Commissioner inquiries, Shearer said the department had incurred expenses for personal protective equipment, they were still looking into reopening costs, recreation staff were still working remotely and/or alternating schedules, caution tape around playgrounds and picnic areas wasn't visually appealing, but was cost-effective; they would refresh park signage for a cleaner look; receipts for COVID-19 expenses and revenue losses were being compiled for potential reimbursement; and capital improvement projects came out of the general fund, separate from park operating costs.

Commission Calendar

Director Shearer reviewed September meeting items and Commissioner Michaels suggested adding the Open Space Trail Topics Committee to the calendar.

OTHER BUSINESS / UPDATES

Department Reports

Director Shearer announced the fall tree give-away was underway, Camp SOAR was coming to a close, parks staff had closed some unauthorized trails per Commission direction, volunteer Pat CuvIELLO was removing invasive broom in the open space, and Eagle Scout Alexi L. led a project to replace an open space bridge.

ADJOURNMENT: 10:56 PM.

Brigitte Shearer
Parks and Recreation Director