



Recreation and Parks Commission

Meeting Minutes

April 16, 2024, 6:00pm

Pleasant Grove Community Center • 3958 State Hwy 49, Burlington

COMMISSION MEMBERS:

Chair Ms. Lisa Wolff, Vice-Chair Mr. Peter Dahl, Commissioner Bill T. Lashley, Mr. David Woody, Ms. Kelly Ronnow, Mr. Mike Dunning, Dr. Harold Kernodle, Mr. Thomas Purcell, Mr. Craig Yokeley, Elizabeth Read

ALAMANCE PARKS STAFF PRESENT:

Jamie Merchel, Director; Jason Witherspoon, Program Superintendent, Dan Moravec, Community Center Manager, Nolan Carter, Trails and Open Space Coordinator; Guil Johnson, Athletic Director; Anna Bowland, Grants & Communications Coordinator

PUBLIC PRESENT:

R. Dean Coleman

1) COMMUNICATIONS

- a) The meeting was called to order and a quorum established at 6:00pm
- b) The March 19, 2024 meeting minutes were approved unanimously upon the motion of David Woody and second of Kelly Ronnow.

2) PUBLIC COMMENT

- a) Dean Coleman – Athletics Programming: Mr. Coleman, former director of the Alamance County Recreation and Parks Department from 1970-1997, spoke about the youth athletics. He has concerns about the Department's plan to reorganize the team athletics program. Mr. Coleman feels that the traditional model of team sports is important to keep because it provides youth with experience and exercise. He notes that concerns such as the lack of volunteers and parent/spectator behavior at games have always been issues. He is concerned that if the county does not offer the traditional sports model, local youth will have no choice but to play travel ball. He asks the Department and the Board to reconsider this plan.

3) CHANGE OF AGENDA ORDER

Upon the motion of Commissioner Bill Lashley and second of Craig Yokeley, the board voted in favor of moving the order of the agenda to discuss Alamance Athletics as the first agenda item. The discussion is included below under Old Business.

4) REPORT OF CHAIRMAN

None

5) REPORT OF STAFF

- a) Dan Moravec, Community Center Manager: Dan oversees the Eli Whitney and Pleasant Grove Community Center facilities and programs. The centers serve the community through rentals, open gym, and programs. At Eli Whitney, pickleball is very popular. The center also hosts the annual Eli Whitney Quilting Party, hosts SAFE food bank distribution,

basketball league practice and games, among other activities. The Pleasant Grove Community Center began a new program on April 15 partnering with Meals on Wheels to offer free lunch to people over 60 during week days. Additionally, both centers are utilized for basketball practices and games, archery, and by the Sheriffs Department for community events such as Trunk or Treats.

6) OLD BUSINESS/UPDATES

a) Alamance Athletics – Proposed Programming Modifications Review (item discussed prior to report of staff)

- Staff, the board, and Mr. Coleman had a discussion regarding Youth Athletics programming. Staff addressed some of Mr. Coleman's concerns. Jason Witherspoon, Program Superintendent, explained that currently only around 5% of the county's youth are served through the Department's current programming. Within the past 10 years the number of clubs in the county who sponsor baseball and basketball teams has dropped from 14 to 3, which puts much more work on the Department to run the league. It is difficult to get enough youth signups to make a large league feasible and keep kids playing local. Additionally, family dynamics have changed. With the increase in single family homes, travel sports, and other family commitments, the Department receives feedback that it is hard for families to commit to a league where they are unsure what days/times and locations practices and games will be.
- The new model proposal is in response to changing needs and dynamics within the community. With the new model, the Department hopes to reach more youth in the community who are not currently involved in athletics and to re-engage youth who may not be participating due to the logistics of scheduling. With the new model the Department can still offer basketball and baseball programming as well as additional options such as pickleball, disc golf, kickball, etc.
- Lisa Wolff noted that the trend of increased youth participation in private sports clubs and travel ball is nationwide. It is hard for local government sponsors to compete.
- Jason Witherspoon explained some details of the program. Parents will be able to sign up for a set day, time and location of the program. The program will begin with weeks of instruction followed by games. Teams will be organized in a way that evens out skill level amongst the teams.
- Tommy Purcell asked if it was possible for the Department to offer transportation to help get more kids involved. This is possible but logistically challenging.
- Jamie Merchel stated that the program changes do not end team sports – they are an effort to shift the model in order to better serve more youth. The Department may have enough interest to offer multiple options in the future.
- Upon the motion of Craig Yokeley and second of Elizabeth Read the board voted in favor of the Department to proceed with the updated youth athletics programming model.

b) Barefoot Traditional Archers discussion

- At the March meeting, Barefoot Traditional Archers presented to the board and asked permission to present their traditional archery offerings to current archery students and the final session of the season. The board discussed this proposal. Elizabeth Read was concerned that a presentation would impact the already limited amount of time archery students have to shoot. Sessions run back to back and it could get crowded in the gym. Kelly Ronnow agreed. Nolan Carter explained that the Department is also in the process of setting up and supporting an outside club for archers who are interested in further development beyond our beginner program. Lisa asked staff if Barefoot

Traditional Archers would be in competition with what the Department offers. Staff responded that it was not in competition – it is a different type of archery. After discussion, it was determined that the most effective way to distribute information about outside clubs was through flyers or email.

- Upon the motion of Craig Yokeley and second of Peter Dahl, the board voted in favor of accepting the staff recommendation to allow Barefoot Traditional Archers to provide information and materials to students completing the Alamance Parks archery program. Staff will reach out to Barefoot Traditional Archers to coordinate this effort.

c) Haw River Trail

- Peter and Nolan provided Haw River Trail updates. Saturday, April 20 will be a workday for the volunteer trail builders. They are building a .2 mile paddle access trail off of highway 54 in Graham.
- Alston Quarter land track – the Department has applied for 2 grants in order to help acquire property in this area which are still pending. Staff is in the process of preparing a presentation for state legislators about this opportunity.
- Camp and Clean will be held May 18-19 at Shallow Ford Natural Area. There will be a land and paddle cleanup option with the opportunity to camp overnight. Harold Kernodle suggested sharing this information with the Haw River Assembly to assist with advertising the event.

d) Cane Creek Mountains Natural Area Development

- Tower construction is underway, concrete bags are being delivered this week. The Department received a \$87,000 grant from the Conservation Fund to assist with the last portion of funding needed.
- Phase 3 parking lot planning is underway. The Department is working through permitting.

e) Cedarrock Park Playground

- The playground is nearly complete. The next step is to pour the rubber surfacing followed by fencing and sidewalk and parking construction. A ribbon cutting will be held mid-May. More information will be shared with the board as it is available.

f) BE Jordan Ballfield Renovation

- This project is making good progress. Around 90% of the project funds should be spent and purchase orders issued before the end of the fiscal year. Jamie confirmed to the board that the final project budget was \$750,000.
- The Department also received a \$50,000 grant from Impact Alamance to construct a .75-.9 mile walking trail around the facility. Work on this portion will begin this summer/fall.

g) Great Alamance Creek

- The feasibility study draft is complete and staff and committee members are reviewing. It will be released for public input soon.
- The Village of Alamance Paddle Access is on hold until the donation from Duke Energy is finalized.

7) NEW BUSINESS

- a) Commission Members Expiring Terms – June 30, 2024 (Kelly R., Lisa W., Peter D.)

- Jamie reminded members of upcoming expiring terms. They will need to reapply to serve on the Commission. She will send a link to each of the application.
- b) Grant Award from the Conservation Fund to assist with Cane Creek Observation Tower
- The Department received a \$87,000 grant from the Conservation Fund to assist with the last portion of funding needed.
- c) 2024 Alcovets Balloon Festival
- The Balloon Festival will be held September 18-20 at Cedarock Park. Alcovets has asked the County Commissioners to waive the \$4,000 rental fee to the Department for hosting the event, citing improvements that the group has made at the park in order to host the event. Assistant County Manager Brian Baker is providing more details to the County Commissioners about the impact of this usage of the park in order for them to make a decision about the request. Parks board members asked why the fee was so high for this event. Staff explained that this is because the event shuts the park to the public during the event.
- d) May Meeting
- Staff have proposed to move the May meeting to an afternoon meeting. The board agreed to this change. The May 21st meeting will be held at 12:30pm at Saxapahaw Island Park.

8) ADJOURNMENT

Upon the motion of Peter Dahl and second of Lisa Wolff the meeting was adjourned at 7:40pm.