

RECREATION AND PARKS BOARD

OF ST. MARY'S COUNTY

Meeting of Thursday, May 1, 2003

Minutes

Board members present: Robert Harper, Chairperson; Kaki Burruss, Coleman Hillman, Jody Payne, Robert Richardson, Andrew Roper and Richard Smith.

Board members absent: Cheryl Blazer.

Recreation and Parks staff present: Phil Rollins, Director of Recreation and Parks (R&P); Arthur Shepherd, Recreation Division Manger; Bill Ball, Parks Manager; and Kathy Bailey, Recorder.

CALL TO ORDER

The Board meeting was called to order by Robert Harper, Chairperson, at 5:35 P.M. in Room 14 of the Governmental Center in Leonardtown.

APPROVAL OF MINUTES

Robert Richardson motioned, seconded by Coleman Hillman, to approve the minutes of April 24, 2003. Motion carried 5-0.

R&P DEPARTMENT BUDGET OVERVIEW

Director Phil Rollins provided several handouts detailing the FY2004 proposed Administration, Museum, Parks Maintenance (and other line items including the Teen Center and Swimming Pool) general funded budgets. The handouts provided information on the approved FY2003 budget, requested FY2004 funds and the FY2004 recommended budget.

Mr. Rollins reminded the Board that the proposed annual Great Mills Swimming Pool operating budget is approximately \$280,000. In the Department's preliminary budget submittal, staff proposed a budget that would have generated approximately \$140,000 in revenue from pool user fees. Another \$30,000 was proposed to be used from the Recreation Enterprise Fund from projected surplus program revenues. The balance of \$110,000 was requested from the General Fund (tax support).

Staff was directed to consider other alternatives for funding the \$110,000 shortfall. After consideration of various alternatives, staff recommended increasing the proposed pool fees by 40% to generate an additional \$55,630 –

about half of the short fall. The other \$55,600 was recommended to be covered by a reduction in the Parks Maintenance budget. Specifically, the frequency of grasscutting, saving \$29,000 (reduce the frequency of cuts by 2 or 3 times per year), and port-a-johns would no longer be provided at parks and athletic fields without restrooms, which will save \$26,000.

Though not the most desirable option, staff made the recommendation outlined above to make the Great Mills Swimming Pool budget balance. Another option would be to take the full amount from grasscutting; that would impact youth leagues and park users by reducing the frequency of cuts by 4 or 5 times per year. Another option would be to eliminate two seasonal laborer positions, thus impacting the level of service in parks. Another possibility would be to require users to pay for electricity at Chancellor's Run Regional Park Activity Center and at Margaret Brent Recreation Center, which is currently being paid for from the General Fund. Charges for heating oil for Leonard Hall and Margaret Brent Recreation Center could also be passed on to users. Fees could also be charged for irrigation of athletic fields. Staff did not think funding could be taken from Parks operating expenses since the Division budget is tight already; additionally, no reductions could be identified in the Administration or Museum budgets.

Mr. Rollins noted that this is a very difficult fiscal budget year in light of State budget cuts that will be passed on to Counties.

Kaki Burruss asked, "what effect would the elimination of the two seasonal park laborer positions have on park operations?" Bill Ball, Parks Manager, stated that standards of maintenance and quality of service would be effected, especially during the spring and summer. Fields may not be maintained in time for games and trashcans may not be emptied as quickly as they have been in the past.

POOL MANAGEMENT & OPERATIONS OPTIONS

Partial Year Operation – Mr. Rollins provided a handout detailing swimming pool funding levels, which included comparisons for possible opening dates for the pool - revised budget (full year - \$280,752), a September 2003 opening (\$235,831) and a January 2004 opening (\$146,876). Due to the anticipated budget shortfall, the Board discussed the option of not opening the pool until January 2004. The Board weighed the approximate \$15,000 savings if the pool opens in January against the reality that the public expects the pool to open in September. Currently, the pool is scheduled to be completed in time for fall 2003, weather and construction permitting.

Robert Harper stated that if the pool isn't fully funded, the Board may need to consider making a recommendation that the facility open in January in order to avoid offsetting the operation of the pool with cuts to other R&P programs and services.

Andrew Roper stated he'd like to see the pool opened on time but doesn't recommend doing that at the expense of other programs and park maintenance.

Ms. Burruss asked if the handout was based upon increasing the pool fees by 40% and using \$30,000 from the Recreation Enterprise Fund. Mr. Rollins responded that the handout is based upon a 40% increase in pool user fees and using \$30,000 from the Enterprise Fund.

Jody Payne asked if a yearly pool pass had been recommended. Mr. Rollins stated that staff is working on a schedule of options for patrons and that will be presented to the Board in the near future.

R&P Direct Management – Staff proposed that the swimming pool be operated by Recreation and Parks with Aquatics becoming a new division of the department. **Option 1**- hire a full-time merit Coordinator to manage and supervise the pool operation. In the future, the Coordinator might be responsible for implementing activities at the County's waterfront park properties. The Recreation Division Manager would supervise this position. The implementation of a full time benefited position would attract experienced individuals in the aquatic field. The cost of the benefit package would be approximately \$10,000. **Option 2** – hire a non-merit (paid hourly wage) Pool Manager. This employee would be compensated at a comparable rate to the merit position, but no full-time health and retirement benefits would be offered. This position would manage the pool operation and be supervised by the department's Leisure Program Coordinator. Under this scenario, the cost of the benefit package would be saved, but recruiting and retaining a qualified professional will be difficult.

Mr. Rollins stated that, for the first year of operation, R&P recommends option 2 – hiring a non-merit Pool Manager to supervise the pool operation (similar to the Gymnastics Center Manager). He stated that option 1 could be a possibility for the second year of operation if all goes well with the first year of operation.

Contractual Management – Under this scenario, the pool management and all operations would be contracted. All revenue collection and expenses related to the pool operation would be the responsibility of a contractor. The contractor would remit 20% of all net revenue to R&P. Benefits with this option would be that the costs associated with the pool would be the responsibility of the contractor and not Recreation and Parks. The drawbacks include loss of management control related to fees and programs offered and concerns with whether qualified contractors will respond to the RFP, considering the pool is estimated to operate at a deficit.

Dr. Roper suggested advertising an RFP/market search to see what the interest is for pool contract management. Mr. Shepherd previously contacted the YMCA and was told that a stand alone pool operation would not generate significant interest in contract management. A pool with an adjacent recreation center could

provide interest from potential vendors due to the possibility of increased revenue from programs at the recreation Center.

Ms. Burruss asked, if option one were approved, what type of activities at waterfront park properties would the Aquatics Coordinator supervise? Mr. Rollins stated that programs might be expanded at Elms Beach and other sites to include swimming supervision.

Ms. Burruss asked for clarification regarding fees paid by sports leagues to use athletic fields. Mr. Rollins stated that, currently, users of County maintained athletic fields do not pay a field use fee. Fees are assessed for pavilion rentals. Leagues do pay fees for electricity when using lights at some athletic fields; that fee is currently being reviewed. Users of County boat ramps are currently paying no fees.

Robert Richardson left the meeting at 6:25 P.M.

Jody Payne expressed support for opening the pool in September. She stated that citizens would not be happy with a January 2004 opening if the pool was completed in time for a September 2003 opening. Ms. Burruss agreed with Ms. Payne.

Ms. Payne left the meeting at 6:30 P.M.

Coleman Hillman expressed support for opening the pool in September. He asked if any group has stepped forward to do fundraising for the pool. Mr. Rollins stated that, to date, no organization or group has stepped forward to conduct fundraising.

Andrew Roper motioned, seconded by Richard Smith, to recommend to the BOCC to delay the opening of the swimming pool until January 2004 and to attempt to cover the budget shortfall from grasscutting services and to support staff's management option number two, to hire a full-time, hourly wage pool manager. Motion carried 3-2.

Dr. Roper expressed regret that the pool funding proposal calls for reductions in other services. Mr. Smith also expressed concern with reducing the Parks Division budget to fund the pool. He stated that adequate funding should be provided to keep parks and facilities maintained at the current level of service and that the idea of additional user fees should be explored.

Ms. Burruss expressed the preference for sending a letter to the BOCC recommending the pool open in September with the possibility of implementing additional fees or other ways of funding the shortfall. She also was concerned with the plan to hire a full time employee to manage the pool and not to provide health benefits. Mr. Hillman agreed with Ms. Burruss' recommendation.

Mr. Harper will draft a letter to the BOCC outlining the Board's motion and provide some background information on alternatives discussed. Mr. Rollins stated that after the FY2004 budget is adopted by the BOCC, a letter would be sent to affected users of facilities explaining the impact of budget reductions and the possibility of implementation of user fees.

SCHEDULING OF NEXT MEETING

The next regularly scheduled meeting of the Recreation and Parks Board of St. Mary's County will be held at 5:30 P.M. on Thursday, June 5, 2003 in Room 14 of the Governmental Center in Leonardtown.

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ADJOURNMENT

The meeting was adjourned at 6:40 P.M.

Kathy Bailey, Recorder

Minutes approved by the Recreation and Parks Board on June 5, 2003.

A tape recording of the meeting is kept on file in the Recreation and Parks' office for one year.

cc: Board of County Commissioners

St. Mary's County Department Heads

Recreation and Parks Department Division Heads