



County of San Mateo Special Meeting in Lieu of Regular Meeting

Parks and Recreation Commission Meeting

June 4, 2020 from 3:00 p.m. to 5:00 p.m.

*****BY VIDEOCONFERENCE ONLY*****

Draft Minutes

Chair Green opened the meeting at 3:00 p.m.

1. Pledge of Allegiance

2. Roll Call

The Commission Clerk took roll

Present: Chair Green, Vice Chair Merrilees, Commissioner Okelo, Commissioner Manneh, Commissioner Okelo

3. Public Comment

This item is reserved for persons wishing to address the Commission on any Parks-related matters that are not otherwise on this meeting agenda. As with all public comment, members of the public who wish to address the Commission should complete a speaker's slip. Speakers are customarily limited to two minutes.

4. Action to Set the Agenda

Motion: Merrilees/ Second: Okelo

Yes: Manneh, Merrilees, Green, Okelo

No: 0

5. Parks Foundation Executive Director's Report

Executive Director Michele Beasley gave the report for the San Mateo County Parks Foundation.

One of the things that the Executive Director reported on was that management of the Commemorative Bench Program will move from the Parks Department to the Parks Foundation office. Commissioner Okelo asked Director Calderon, "is there any reason the commemorative bench and table program never got to the Commission before a decision was made to pass it on?" He thinks it's a good idea and would be supportive of it anyway, but this is the first time the Commission is knowing about it's after the fact.

Director Calderon responded to Commissioner Okelo that this was something that had been talked about prior to Covid, and the decision was made. Director Calderon appreciates the interest in having items like that to consider so he apologizes for this. Going forward Director

Calderon will make sure matters like this come before the Commission.

Commissioner Okelo added that if a decision is made it would be good to put it on the Agenda as some actions that were taken by staff – as a line item. He thinks that the Commission wouldn't be opposed to the department making such decisions but it is important that these decisions are reported by the Director.

Commissioner Green thanked Executive Director Beasley, and followed that with a question. Commissioner Green recalled that back in the winter, the Executive Director mentioned she was about to embark on some strategic planning. Has that work been initiated, completed, and when do you think we'd be able to hear about that?

The Executive Director responded that it makes sense for the Parks Department to update their strategic plan and support them as much as possible. At their Board retreat, the Foundation talked about how they prioritized what they funded in terms of programs and projects in support of San Mateo County Parks. Then Covid hit and needs change. Things that we had prioritized for the summer like kite festivals and Coyote Nights aren't happening and that means they will be focusing their efforts in other places. The Foundation's focus is how they can connect people to San Mateo County Parks, and how they've been doing that is going to look a little different over the next 12-24 months. The Foundation does have its own core goals and she is happy to talk a little bit more about what was discussed at their Board retreat.

Chair Green responded that yes, if the Executive Director thinks there is a time where it would be timely and informative to share that information, that would be welcome.

6. Department Report

- 6.1 Director's Report – Re-engage the Commission on some of our high-profile projects. Off-leash dog pilot program, brought to the February Commission meeting. The dog policy will be on hold for a little bit due to Covid. It will be delayed in being brought to the Board, later this summer or early fall.

Regarding the Memorial Park project, the Department is putting over \$10 Million into investments in the Park with this project. The park will be closed for the year to complete the upgrades.

The 5-year Interpretive Plan had been presented to the Commission at a prior meeting. The department is discussing how to provide services in a post-Covid world. Until we understand how we are going to provide those services, how we will safely provide interpretive programs, and engage the public to understand what it is they want out of our parks, we will put the plan on hold.

Chair Green had a question about the Administrative and Fiscal Services portion of the report, about the budget. The Fiscal 2021 budget is pending before the Board for approval. She wants to understand if the department's budget assumes the continuation of usage of corrections labor in our parks.

Director Calderon answered that while that is not reflected in our department, we do assume that the CDCR crews will be available to us to some degree to continue to assist us with projects, and it has been our intention to continue partnering with CAL FIRE to do those types of tasks.

Chair Green asked to clarify if it was about 17 people for about a month?

Superintendent Lombardi explained that 15-20 projects are pre-planned the year before and it all depends on what the fire situation is in California. We pre-plan the projects, we put them on the agenda. But if resources are pulled for fires in California, they are not attending those projects. Director Calderon said that he would get back to Chair Green regarding the number of CDCR inmates that are used.

Chair Green said that we only meet every two months and the matter is before the Board now, she is opposed to the use of corrections labor at little to no cost – far below the living wage. She knows it is constitutionally allowable, she does not believe it is right. She does not believe this is where the County of San Mateo should be saving its pennies. She is happy to write a letter to the Board on behalf of herself, or if other Commissioners would like to sign on with her, she is happy to do that on everyone's behalf.

Director Calderon said that best time to do this would be at September revisions, which are not before the Board yet, which gives us time to work on this. At next Commission meeting he will have an item on the Agenda regarding this and will provide commission with the following information: number of crew members, number of days each crew is estimated to work, number of total hours this represents, equivalent financial cost.

Commissioner Okelo said that he agrees with Chair Green about this issue and agrees with the Director that this should be brought back to the Commission.

Commissioner Okelo had a question about Memorial Park campgrounds improvement project. We are in a new normal now with the Covid-19 and we don't know how long it will be with us. Is there any effort being made to redesign the campground to reflect the new reality?

Director Calderon responded that while we will not be redesigning the campgrounds, we will be re-evaluating how we program the campgrounds. For example, will be letting families from different households stay in the same camp sites and same tents as one another or not. The individual camp sites are also built into the natural environment and we could end up damaging the natural environment by having to re-establish all of those given the natural landscape. But programming is where we have a lot of flexibility to determine how we allow people to use it.

Vice-Chair Merrilees has had some questions from constituents about re-opening Devil's Slide Trail and the little parking lot there. When will that re-open? Also, Fitzgerald Marine Reserve still has closed signs. The tidepools are fenced off of course, but is there a plan to re-open the bluffs and get rid of the no parking signs that are on the street? Director Calderon answered these later in the meeting.

Chair Green had a question about the Tunitas Creek Improvement Project. In the Director's Report it mentions first draft project alternatives. Do those alternatives include Ranger housing at the site?

Director Calderon responded that it does not. We have not been able to identify a potable water source there as well as the topography on the property is such that it limits our development potential, we are working to find how we can create enough visitor serving recreational amenities, such as picnic sites, restrooms, ADA trails, and overlooks

that we are out of land. Director Calderon said that the house that exists there now is the primary location for visitor amenities.

Chair Green suggested that she would like to see at least one alternative that includes Ranger housing.

7. Regular Agenda

7.1 Approval of the (Date) Parks and Recreation Commission Meeting Minutes of February 6, 2020 (ACTION)

Motion: / Second:

Yes:

No: 0

Before the motion to vote, Commissioner Okelo commented that he thinks the motion he made at that meeting regarding the dog off-leash item and the dog workgroup's recommendation was a little bit mis-stated. He wants a chance to go back and listen to the tape of the meeting and clarify what he said.

The Commission did not vote on the minutes during the meeting, and continued approval of these minutes until the next meeting.

Motion to Continue the Approval of the February 6, 2020 Minutes to the next meeting:
Merrilees/ Second: Okelo

Chair Green took roll call for this vote: Manneh - Aye; Green - Aye

7.2 Parks and Recreation Commission's Presentation to the Board of Supervisors (continued from the February 6, 2020 Commission Meeting)

Due to the Covid-19 pandemic, the Board of Supervisors is only hearing matters that are of an urgent nature. Chair Green believes that a report on accomplishments and future goals for the Commission is not of an urgent nature and thus should be rescheduled to a later date. Necessary public business.

Board meets every week. Every other week the meeting is dedicated to specifically to Covid. The off weeks are the regularly scheduled board meetings, which are also focused on Covid and the budget. Director Calderon does not recall seeing an item such as this being presented to the Board recently. Most of the items are financial based or health based, but he would be more than happy to speak to the County Manager to see if we can put an item like this on the agenda at this time or if we will need to wait. The Board has greatly decreased the number of items they are listening to during this unique time.

Chair Green and Commissioner Manneh will work together on the presentation to the Board, so when they get a time on the Board's calendar, they will be ready. Commissioner Okelo said that he thinks we should delay the Commission's report to the Board until next year, when hopefully their focus won't be totally on Covid. Commissioner Manneh added that he is happy to meet with Chair Green in July to prepare something to present to the Board as soon as possible. Chair Green responded that the Commission can take follow the advice of the Director regarding a meeting date with the Board.

7.3 Accept the Department's update regarding operations during the Covid-19 pandemic (ACTION)

Motion: Merrilees / Second: Okelo

Yes: Manneh: Aye, Chair Green: Aye

No: 0

Vice-Chair Merrilees was asking about Fitzgerald Marine Reserve earlier. The trails on the bluff are open, the ramp and the stairs down to the tidepools are closed. Even though this area is closed, we still see people hopping the fences. What people don't realize is that we have harbor seal pups down on the beach, and there are potential serious ramifications if people start flooding that beach.

Commissioner Okelo asked if there will be street parking at Wunderlich in Phase II. There isn't much parking available there in the lot. Director Calderon responded that during Phase II, the department will still be discouraging parking on Woodside Road. The department is working to create new parking opportunities on site. Woodside Road has a very small shoulder, there are bike riders, and cars that like to speed so parking on the street is discouraged. The department is opening more parking at Huddart, we are opening additional restrooms throughout the system, and additional parks as well.

Commissioner Merrilees said the PARKS CLOSED sign is at the seal cove entrance to the bluff side of the park, so it makes it look like the bluff is not open. To Director Calderon, is the bluff open or not open?

Director Calderon replied that the bluff walk is open. The department will reposition that sign to remove confusion.

Commissioner Merrilees mentioned that there are also No Parking sandwich signs all over the public streets around that entrance. There are also a bunch of No Parking signs that are up in Montara. When the parking lots were closed at the beach, people were parking in the neighborhoods. He doesn't know if it was Public Works or Parks that put up those signs. He would like to get those signs taken down as quickly as possible. The reason is that for the residents, there is always anti-visitor sentiment - they would rather that the visitors just don't come because the parks are much nicer when they are emptier, and same with the beach. Since those signs have gone up and the 5-mile rule was instituted, people have used that as an excuse to call the Rangers and the Sheriff's Office on the visitors who are just walking around and not bothering anybody. As soon as the parks open it would be good to notify the neighbors that the parks are open.

Director Calderon assured Commissioner Merrilees that we would follow up on the No Parking signs in the community, as well as the A-frame sign at Seal Cove. The message Parks has been giving is that County Parks belong to County Residents, regardless of where you live. With that said, we are obligated to follow the Health Order that is in effect at the time, although even during the closure we were very soft in our enforcement. We educated people rather than write citations and run people out. We want voluntary compliance.

Commissioner Merrilees thanked Director Calderon for this and said that perhaps in the future we can have an agenda item to discuss this further and what we can do to make that point to neighbors. Superintendent Lombardi added that he's been out in the field almost every day for the past four and a half weeks with staff. They have been

professional, they have been compassionate to the needs of people. Since other agencies are not open, we have been overwhelmed at times, but we have stayed professional and embraced everyone coming to the Parks system. We did an *exceptional job* with staff and management. We will try to get better messaging out, but Superintendent Lombardi has said hello and have a good day to about 15,000-17,000 in the last 4 ½ weeks, for the department and the County.

Vice-Chair Merrilees said this is not any criticism of the Rangers. The Rangers are absolutely top notch, professional, and have everyone's best interest at heart. It's really just to let everyone know that there was kind of a weaponization of the 5-mile limit, and there's a residue from that. It's going to be hard to get people back into welcoming people and sharing. Commissioner Merrilees recounted an incident he saw where people of color drove up and parked, intending to walk into the park, and a Sheriff's Deputy came up and very politely told them to leave. While Commissioner Merrilees' neighborhood is predominantly white, this is not right what the Deputies did. If we do have another strict closure, we need to do better about letting people know that people are welcome.

Chair Green said before we move on we had been talking about the Interpretive Plan and explaining Parks History – that's a communications document. Chair Green is suggesting making it clear who is welcome in the parks could be a part of that. It's understood during Covid-19 we have limitations on crowds, but ultimately we do want people to want to use the parks. This seems like a reasonable part of our strategic thinking.

Commissioner Okelo is particularly disturbed about the observation that Vice Chair Merrilees shared about non-residents in the neighborhood being whisked away politely by the Sheriff's Department. Is there any way we could have a talk with the Sheriff's Department, a frank discussion with them, to emphasize that these are public parks, and being public parks, they are open to anybody from the county, and even outside the county? We don't have anyone outside asking you for an ID to determine if you live in the county or not. Commissioner Okelo was at the George Floyd protest yesterday and he was amazed at the level of unity of the various members of the community but at the same time, the level of anger. People want to vent and release. They were releasing by screaming loud and shouting and it reminded him that do have the resources to help people deal with that frustration and anger. They can come to our parks and walk amongst the trees and feel calm and feel healed and connect with nature. And anything that would provide an obstacle, whether it is a Sheriff or a neighbor, we need to figure out things proactively that we can do to prevent that. He also suggests that in addition to having discussions with the Sheriff, perhaps people that live close to public parks, if the number is not too overwhelming we can send them letters thanking them for being welcoming in the past and encouraging them to continue to be welcoming. We need to remind them as politely as we can that these are public parks and they belong to everyone in the county, and everybody should be able to utilize them with ease.

Commissioner Manneh added that in most jobs, there should be some form of sensitivity or cultural training. Someone should reach out to the Sheriff and say that they should be more sensitive and stop being discriminatory. It's all about their delivery, how they say it, and this goes for all nationalities.

Chair Green asked for Public Comment. There was none so we moved on to the next item.

- 7.4 Make a recommendation to the San Mateo County Board of Supervisors to amend the San Mateo County Parks Department fee schedule by eliminating the vehicle entrance fee at Flood County Park. (ACTION)

Motion: Merrilees / Second: Manneh

Yes: Okelo: Aye, Green: Aye

No: 0

Vice Chair Merrilees responded to Director Calderon that this is the right thing to do and maybe we can do this at other Parks as well.

Commissioner Okelo said that he's torn on this one. He's totally in support of increasing access to everybody, but he has a few questions. Director Calderon mentioned that the vehicle entrance fee is \$6. Of the 114,200 visitors you said use the park, is there some sort of breakdown that tells us who those people are and does it tell us if there are some people that have been precluded from using the park?

Director Calderon answered that we could provide a breakdown based on who had a reservation at a picnic site, versus who was just coming to use the park. The department doesn't track visitor's financial resources and who of the 114,200 are unable to pay or are reluctant to pay. That's not something we track. We could break that down by people who are there for a special event or just a casual visit.

Commissioner Okelo said that there's a possibility that all of those folks going to Flood Park could actually pay, so reducing or eliminating the fee may not have an impact. Commissioner Okelo would like to see the data that the Director could provide, and he will also talk to the constituents of Belle Haven and East Palo Alto, and get a sense of who uses Flood Park and if that \$6 entrance fee is a hindrance.

Director Calderon thanked Commissioner Okelo. He added that one additional piece of data they could provide was for those who made reservations, they could break it down by zip code, but that's still only a portion of the population coming to the park. Commissioner Okelo thanked him. The Director said further engaging with the public would be helpful and that's the type of information that will help us in our 5-Year Interpretive Plan. As we engage with the public we want to understand how to communicate with them, offer programs that they want to participate in, but also what are some of the barriers to them participating.

Chair Green, is this elimination of the fee permanent or are we testing it? Director Calderon answered that what we are proposing is a full waiver.

Public Comment from Alice Newton: She sent an email. She has lived adjacent to Flood Park for 33 years and she thinks it's wonderful that the department is going to open the trails for walking. Her hope is that the park will be open to vehicles without a fee, and that the parking lot is open as soon as possible. In the past when there were so many cars that the overflow had to park along the street, it became a problem. We then didn't have room for our own guests to park, and sometimes people speed on the streets. We have a lot of children that live on both sides of Flood Park. For safety reasons and accessibility reasons, she hopes that cars will be able to park in the parking lot as soon as possible and it's wonderful that we are going to remove the fee.

No other public comment.

Chair Green said that before she calls for a motion on this item, her comment is the understanding the desire to eliminate the fee without a pilot period, in the hopes it will create greater accessibility, it's important to understand who is going to the parks. We can't improve what we don't measure and if we just continue to shrug our shoulders to say we don't know, we don't know if people of less means are using our parks or not, then we will never be able to make progress towards betterment there. Chair Green thinks this kind of measurement is important so we can get better. No matter where we are we would want to be better.

Commissioner Okelo had a statement before we vote. Is there a way we could fund a sample survey Fair Oaks, Belle Haven Community in Menlo Park, and East Palo Alto? He'd like to find out the extent of the usage of Flood Park in the last several years so we can gather the data and can determine the rightness of the decision we are making. If we find out that a lot of them don't utilize the park, that will tell us that the 114,200 visitors are probably part of a whole other population. Commissioner Okelo supports this motion anyway but is there some additional work we can do that would help us?

Director Calderon thinks this might be something that would be very helpful during our 5-year Interpretive Plan. Commissioner Okelo agreed.

8. Commissioner Reports

Chair Green will report first. We missed a meeting in April, there are some items that have slipped (referring to the December workplan). She is continuing to use that to make sure that nothing is falling through the cracks, and she looks forward to catching up.

Commissioner Okelo, gave a reminder that the Commissioners want a copy of the workplan in each packet. Additionally, he volunteered to be a liaison to the youth commission, but he doesn't know who it is he needs to connect with. The Commission Clerk said she would speak with the County Manager's Office and let him know who the current liaison is.

Vice Chair Merrilees has been sheltering in place and is realizing that it is important to get out. He knows people have been sneaking past the 5-mile radius to go to parks, which means that the parks are very important to other people too. It's really important to get out and recreate and we will try to present opportunities for people to get out and use parks safely.

9. Items for Future Agenda

Letter to the Board requesting that the Department no longer use Department of Correction crews for fuel reduction.

Presentation on Department's Strategic Priorities, will be given in August which will also give us a better sense of the budget.

The Director asked the Commissioners if they would be interested in having a special meeting in September regarding Tunitas Creek Beach, given the complexity of the issue and the timing, he feels like a special meeting in September would not only allow us to best give the information to the Commissioners, but also work really well within our timing for the overall project.

Authorization for the San Mateo County Parks Foundation to sell Annual Passes on behalf of the Department.

Consideration of the Parks Department's Fiscal Year 2020-21 Proposed Budget.

10. Adjournment

Motion: Merrilees / **Second:** Manneh

Meeting Adjourned at 5:00 p.m.

County of San Mateo Parks and Recreation Commission

*Barbara Bonilla, District 1 | Heather Green, District 2 (Chair) | Neil Merrilees, District 3 (Vice-Chair)
Meda O. Okelo, District 4 | Basem Manneh, District 5 | Eeshan Bhat, Youth Commissioner*

County of San Mateo Parks Department:

*Nicholas J. Calderon, Parks Director
Lori Mrizek, Executive Secretary*

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Commission Clerk.

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