

La Porte County Park Board Meeting

December 5, 2023

CALL TO ORDER

PLEDGE OF ALLEGIANCE

ROLL CALL

- All Board members present.
- 8 guests: Pickleball club members, Earl Cunningham, Joe Haney, ALCO TV

APPROVAL OF AGENDA

- Mike made a motion to approve the agenda (Public Comment section has been moved to right before the Financial Reports).
- Mary Nell seconded the motion.
- Motion carried, 7-0

APPROVAL OF MINUTES

- Mary made a motion to approve the minutes from the August 1, 2023 meeting.
- Jim seconded the motion.
- Motion carried, 7-0.

PUBLIC COMMENT

- Members of the pickleball group stated that they were at the meeting to find out what was happening with the decision on pickleball courts at Creek Ridge County Park.
- Ron said that discussion would be later in the meeting.

FINANCIAL REPORTS

- Erin made a motion to approve the Financial Reports.
- Mike seconded the motion.
- Motion carried, 7-0.

SUPERINTENDENT'S REPORT

1. Administrative Report

- **Park website update-**
 - Great improvement! Very user friendly, both for us and for park patrons.
 - SERA Group is great to work with.
 - We are getting email inquiries *daily* from the website, which was not the case before.
- **Bluhm DNR project update-**
 - Still moving forward; meeting with regulatory agencies.
 - Questions and concerns are being discussed between DNR and various agencies.
- **Pioneer Days update-**
 - We had over 2,600 attendees.
 - We brought in over \$2,600 in revenue.
 - This was the first Pioneer Day event for both our Chief Naturalist and our Rec & Ed Programmer. They both did a fine job.

2. Maintenance & Construction Report
 - **Creek Ridge restroom update-**
 - Should be up and running before the end of the year!
 - This is a great improvement to Creek Ridge County Park!
3. Programs Report
 - The Nature Center staff have added some new programs to the roster that are being very well received.
 - Most of the programs are free or very little cost to the public.
4. Park Counts
 - Our numbers continue to rise! The new facilities, playgrounds and restrooms, are bringing people in.

REPORTS OF STANDING COMMITTEES

1. Executive Committee: Ron and Jim
 - No report.
2. Budget Committee: Erin and Mary
 - No report.
3. Personnel Committee: Erin and Mary
 - **Superintendent performance review-**
 - Mary reported that she will be emailing the yearly survey regarding Jeremy's job performance to all park staff on Thursday.
 - **2024 committee positions-**
 - Erin reported that no one on the Board has expressed an interest in moving to another committee.
 - Ron and Jim have agreed to continue on as president and vice president.
 - Mary Nell made a motion to retain both Ron and Jim in their current positions; seconded by Mike. Motion carried 7-0.
 - Jeremy took this opportunity to bring up the fact that Erin has informed him that she will be stepping down from her position on the Park Board after 18 years. She has stated that she is willing to remain on the Board until a replacement has been appointed. Her position on the Park Board is appointed by Judge Alevizos.
4. Property Committee: Mike and Mary Nell
 - No report.
5. Planning Committee: Amanda and Mary Nell
 - **Creek Ridge pickle ball discussion-** The Park Board has given much consideration to the possibility of putting in pickle ball courts at Creek Ridge, but there are several large concerns:
 - Pioneer Days requires the use of the proposed area for parking, which would not be possible due to fencing around the courts.
 - Once park ground is paved over, it is very difficult and expensive to regain.
 - There are several pickle ball courts being proposed in other places in the county, and it doesn't seem as critical at this point to put some in at this location.
 - The longevity of the popularity of the sport is unknown.

- Creek Ridge is the only one of our parks that can accommodate an event the size of Pioneer Days, and Pioneer Days brings in a large amount of park revenue which goes into our non-reverting fund.
 - Earl Cunningham encouraged the Park Board and Jeremy to get together with the new administration in Michigan City to consider putting courts at Patriot Park. Collaboration brings in more federal funds.
 - **Rolling Prairie property discussion-**
 - Potential for a new County Park in Rolling Prairie at the old County Hwy. Dept. base.
 - Mary Nell and Jim went with Jeremy to look at the property.
 - It is a diamond in the rough, for sure. It has a lot of potential. With a lot of work, it could be a beautiful park.
 - There is a small lake that would be good for kayaking, paddle boarding, and fishing.
 - Commissioner Haney stated that the Highway Dept. would definitely have to clean up after themselves. He thinks that it would be wise to take possession of the property now when it is available, even if we didn't get it developed for a few years.
 - Jeremy posed the question that **if** the Parks Dept. owns the land, are we still eligible for grants/matching grants? The concern is that if the Parks Dept. takes ownership of the land too soon, we won't be able to use the value of the land toward a matching grant. He is going to do some research on that.
 - Mitch Bishop is going to come up with a preliminary drawing.
6. Rules Committee: Amanda and Mike
- **2024 rental rate discussion-**
 - Jeremy's suggestion is to do away with winter rates. We originally offered winter rates to encourage rentals in the "slow" time of year. However, we are seeing that winter really isn't "slow," and the cost to plow, salt, and heat the facility makes it NOT cost effective to offer a winter rate. No other facilities in the area offer a winter rate.
 - Suggested to raise the rental charge for the EEC facility. The rental rate for the EEC is less than some of our shelters. We have made many improvements and it is overdue for a rate increase. Proposed to change from \$120 to \$200 (Weekend rate).
 - Shagbark shelter rate was proposed as an introductory rate. We have had the same rate for three years now. It is the newest shelter we have, and it is well worth a raise in rate. Proposed to go from \$100 to \$120 (Weekend rate).
 - Jim made a motion to accept the new rental rate proposals; seconded by Mary Nell. Motion carried 7-0.

OLD BUSINESS- none

NEW BUSINESS

1. Request to approve 2024 Park Board meeting dates and locations.
 - Erin made a motion to approve; seconded by Mike. Motion carried 7-0.
2. Request to approve proposed rental rates for 2024.

- This was approved in the Rules Committee discussion.
3. Creek Ridge pickle ball approval or disapproval in moving forward with trying to find funding.
 - The Board has agreed to continue investigation on possibly partnering with City parks or PNW in coming up with funding for pickle ball courts elsewhere.
 4. Decision on Kankakee River property.
 - This land is ours on a 30- or 40-year lease (unsure). The lease is due to be renewed in 2025. If we want to renew the lease, we have to apply one year in advance.
 - The property is not accessible by land. It is on the Kankakee River in the floodplain. It has one campsite on it.
 - The property is owned by the DNR and they have expressed an interest in taking it back.
 - The Northwest Paddlers Association had agreed to keep the campsite somewhat maintained. We have reached out to them, but have not heard back from them. We are unsure if they have been maintaining it or not.
 - Jeremy has stated that he will continue researching this and we will pick it up again next meeting.

BOARD & STAFF COMMENTS

1. One additional public comment; One of our guests was extremely grateful that we were at least open to considering the pickle ball courts; and thankful also that we were going to pursue collaboration with City parks.
2. Ron stated that he went to one of the night hikes and enjoyed it very much. He was going to attend another one with one of his grandsons.

ADJOURNMENT

1. Mary made a motion to adjourn the meeting; seconded by Jim. Motion carried 7-0.
2. Meeting adjourned. Have a Merry Christmas, everyone!