



BENTON COUNTY Park Board

MEETING MINUTES June 2024

Board Members Present

Dave McNeal, Chair
Robin Emmingham, Vice Chair
Michael LeCompte, Member
Kit McBurney, Member
Ismael Mendoza-Jimenez, Member

Benton County Employees

Adam Fyall
Carson Robison

Absent (excused)

Frank Cooper, Member

Call to Order/Pledge of Allegiance/Roll Call

The Chair, Dave McNeal, called the meeting to order at 6:32 PM and the Pledge was recited.

Review & Approval of Agenda

The agenda for the June 18, 2024, meeting was approved by the Board.

Review & Approval of Minutes

The May 2024 minutes were reviewed and approved by the Board, with the correction that a couple of typos would be corrected.

Chair's Report

The Chair, Dave McNeal, acknowledged and thanked Mr. Mendoza for his recent radio interview on KONA for Benton County Parks.

Mr. McNeal stated it was a very good interview and a particularly memorable part of the interview for him was Mr. Mendoza's statement that "there are way more good people than bad people using the park, we continue to serve the good people that enjoy the park".

Mr. McNeal also recognized Karla Brown for her years of service on the park board and was thankful for her time as secretary for the board. He stated it would be nice to send a thank you letter to Karla Brown.

Dave thanked member Ms. McBurney for taking this month's minutes.

Committee/Subcommittee Reports

There were no Committee/Subcommittee Reports.

Staff Reports

Adam expressed a big thanks to Mr. Mendoza for his appearance on KONA radio on June 12.

Adam said he had previously suggested to Glenn Vaagen that the next park board member interview for KONA should be with a newer board member to be able to hear a perspective from a new park board member about being on the board.

Adam also said Glen suggested making videos about the county parks for posting on social media as part of additional outreach for the Benton County parks. An example video recommended by a board member was a video of paddled boarders enjoying paddling in the Two Rivers Park.

Adam provided a brief overview regarding a recent meeting out at Horn Rapids Park with a couple of local businessmen regarding their potential interest in establishing some type of business relationship with Benton County Parks for the operation of the campground area at the park. Part of the discussion included the idea of potential increased camp spots along the shoreline. This conversation arose due to the recent closure of the campground for overnight stays, except for the campground rental to large groups. Large group campground rentals are working well for the park personnel and require minimal oversight by staff during group events. As a follow-up to this information about a potential campground expansion, a few board members expressed concern regarding commercial development in the open space areas of the park. The park board members would like to be involved in any further developments regarding this potential business interest.

Business

- **Election of new Park Board Secretary**

Robin nominated Michael LeCompte for the vacant secretary position. Mr. LeCompte agreed to the nomination. There were no other nominations. The board members unanimously approved Mr. LeCompte's nomination. The board members expressed their many thanks to Michael for accepting the secretary position for the park board.

- **Water Stargrass Update & Use of Horn Rapids Park Shoreline**

Thomas Sexton from the Benton Conservation District provided the latest information regarding the District's request for depositing water stargrass cuttings on the shoreline at Horn Rapids Park. Thomas provided that the conservation district recently has gone through a permitting process request to be able to harvest, cut and release the grass at the point of harvesting instead of having to offload it to a designated spot on the shoreline. This new process would provide them with maximum efficiency. If approved, Thomas mentioned that they should be able to cut twice as much stargrass as compared to last season.

The District is hoping to receive approval for this in the next couple of weeks. If approved, the District will also work with the nearby irrigation districts regarding any potential issues with the

floating grass which would occur earlier in the season than the prior season of stargrass cuttings floating in the river.

Thomas said that if they do not receive approval for the cut and release approach then they plan to proceed with offloading the stargrass on the shoreline in a designated area in Horn Rapids Park. This location was previously described to the board during the May 2024 Park Board meeting. Thomas provided a handout during his discussion confirming this previously discussed location.

Thomas stated that the District's goal is to start stargrass harvesting on July 1st. Thomas mentioned that last year they harvested approximately thirty-three acres of stargrass. This year he has observed that the areas that have been harvested still show open water for fish to swim freely and has observed weasels, otters and beavers using these open water channels. Thomas also reported on a study that demonstrated that the water quality in these areas has improved.

At the end of Thomas's presentation, the board members all agreed that the District's plan sounded like a very good approach, especially in the interest of improving the water quality health of the river.

- **Discussion of Parks Staffing**

Adam summarized his thoughts regarding additional county Park department staffing. He reminded the board that he can only spend approximately 20% of his work time in the role of parks manager.

Adam's current goal is that he would like to see the department add 1 full-time field worker (rover/all-purpose), 1 full-time office worker (parks manager), and possibly 1 dedicated summer part time worker.

Adam said that basically the parks are cared for by two personnel (Carson and Mark). Day-to-day Parks Department operations are overseen by the Fairgrounds (Tom French).

Mr. Emmingham stated that while we are expanding our park footprint (planned boardwalk at Two Rivers Park, parking lot at Hover Park, planned acquisition near Wallula Gap) there is not a current plan for increased personnel to help manage these additional areas.

There was some subsequent brainstorming among the board members regarding ideas for improved efficiencies and potential funding areas for additional staffing. Below are a few of the suggestions:

- Could the mowing of the park grass areas along with the grass areas of the Fairgrounds and potentially other county facilities be combined and become a subcontracted service;
- More Park Partners;
- Conservation Futures, or similar programs.

The discussion continued regarding the establishment of a committee of board members to work with Adam and Tom to develop a staffing plan. Mr. Emmingham and Mr. Mendoza volunteered to be on this committee. One item that the board discussed for the committee could be to create

a park employee org chart along with a flow chart of responsibilities, and including the associated time it takes to complete tasks.

- **Two Rivers Park Discussion & Walking Tour**

Adam mentioned that on Thursday, June 20, the Two Rivers Park will have its annual inspection by the Army Corps of Engineers.

The Board discussed the regular popular activities ongoing in the park: disc golf, fishing, paddle boarding, and picnicking.

The Park Board members commented again regarding how great the park looked and expressed their appreciation to Carson for his ongoing work in the park.

The walking tour was conducted after the meeting was adjourned.

Public Comments/Poll of the Board/Adjournment

Public Comment:

Gary Westergaard with the Purple Sage Riders – present with no concluding comment.

Cindy Faith with the Purple Sage Riders asked how long the Fairgrounds has been part of the Parks department. Adam mentioned there is a lot of background that can be discussed at another time.

Poll of the Board:

Robin Emmingham stated that Two Rivers Park looks great. Carson has done a great job getting the park in such good shape. Robin mentioned he was also glad to see Carson at the meeting and thanked him for helping to set up the meeting area. He also stated that Tom provided a very interesting presentation.

Ismael Mendoza-Jimenez expressed how happy he was to be outside for the meeting and that the park looks great.

Michael LeCompte thanked the Board members for their confidence in nominating and selecting him for the secretary position. He also mentioned the park looked great.

Kit McBurney said that the park looks great and thanked Carson for his efforts. She also thanked Thomas Sexton for his presentation.

Dave McNeal said it was a very good meeting and he thinks the Board has taken a major step forward with the establishment of a committee to address the park department staffing issue.

There being no further business, the meeting was adjourned at approximately 8:00 PM.

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