

MINUTES

GRAHAM CREEK NATURE PRESERVE ADVISORY BOARD

407 E. LAUREL AVENUE

FOLEY, ALABAMA

CONFERENCE ROOM

JANUARY 8, 2015

5:30 P.M.

MEETING

Call to Order/Roll Call

Vice Chairman Tommy Patterson called the meeting to order at 5:30 p.m. Board members present: Homer Singleton, Tim Closson, Greg Knight, and Phillip Hinesley. Absent: Chairman Zana Price who was sick and Chad Watkins. Others present: Councilman Wayne Trawick, Recording Secretary Vickey Southern, Jacqueline Trimble, Cathy Gerachis and Dale Brasher (Goodwyn, Mills and Cawood).

MINUTES

Approve Minutes of December 4, 2014

Acting Chairman Patterson asked the members if they had received the corrected draft version of the minutes and they stated they had. Mrs. Southern reported she needed to change Dale's name from Dave and on page 2 under "Discuss Master Plan" it should be Jacksonville State instead of Jackson State.

Mr. Hinesley mentioned on page 4 under Recreation item 9 current activities it states "Fishing from River Banks" it should include Ponds so that it reads "Fishing from River Banks/Ponds" because we also talked about the ponds in the Preserve.

Mr. Singleton made a motion to approve the minutes as amended. Mr. Knight seconded the motion and the vote passed unanimously.

NEW BUSINESS

Discuss Upcoming Events

Ms. Gahagan reported there will be a disc golf tournament planning meeting on Friday but they would like to do a doubles tournament on March 7, 2015 with approximately 50-75 participants. It will be an all day event promoted by the City.

There will also be a traveling disc golf tournament Saturday, January 18, 2015. They come in and get two discs from the company, play and whoever has the best score gets more discs. It is all day so any one can come in and play.

Mr. Closson reported they come in with a RV painted with all the details of the companies. They call it a two-disc challenge to grow the sport and they go around to all the disc golf parks to introduce you to their equipment. One of the drivers is from Fairhope. Mr. Closson spoke with him and his dad when they played at the Preserve. The man flies out Saturday to pick up the RV and will drive back through Texas, Louisiana and stop at every spot. He will be in the Southeast for a while promoting Disc Golf.

Mr. Patterson asked if he is promoting his business. Mr. Closson reported yes he will be supporting their brands: Dynamic Discs, Latitude 64° Golf Discs and Westside Discs. Mr. Patterson asked when someone comes in to make money in a public park what does the City get out of it. Mr. Hinesley reported they have to have a business license. Ms. Gahagan reported she spoke with the Revenue Department and they have to get a license to be able to sell their product. Mr. Patterson reported he saw a commercial on Facebook where the man, who lives in Bay Forest, was promoting his own bows for archery and produced the commercial at Graham Creek Nature Preserve Archery targets. You can see it in the background. Mr. Patterson questioned the use of personal commercial gain in a public park. Mrs. Southern reported the man should have come before Council prior to using the park for a commercial to gain permission. Ms. Gahagan reported with the tournaments if they get the one day license for selling the discs it would be ok even though the license is for a year. Typically you pay for the two discs that you play with and then if you win you can pick a disc from whatever they have. This is all new. They have talked with Gulf Shores and Fairhope and wasn't sure of a standard for these events; however, the minimum is purchasing a business license. There was further discussion regarding this topic.

Ms. Gahagan reported she has been approached to do paddle board classes at Wolf Creek Park and a lease for canoe/kayak rentals out of GCNP and they have not done enough research on it to bring forward. Mrs. Southern reported this might need to be bid out. Ms. Gahagan is looking at it.

YMCA – “Y Get Dirty” – Ms. Gahagan reported she hasn't received any details on the event other than it is in March.

Jog the Bog and Earth Day will be held in April and they are starting to design the criteria for those days and race details.

They are getting reservations regularly for birthday parties and the weddings will be coming in soon. Within the next couple of months Ms. Gahagan would like to develop a rental structure for implementation October 1, 2015, which is the beginning of the next fiscal year for the City. Mr. Hinesley

recommended speaking to Lisa Laraway at the State Park since they lease their pavilions out. They also have rental space at Five Rivers.

Mr. Hinesley made a motion to approve the two disc events (January 18th and March 7th). Mr. Closson seconded the motion and the vote passed unanimously.

Wildlife – Ms. Gahagan reported a group of hikers were walking along the trail and came across a small mama bear and her cub. Bay Forest and Graham Creek Subdivisions residents had someone from the State come down because they found some scat.

In the same area the bears were sited they are seeing a lot of wild hogs. They just paved Philomene Holmes Boulevard and hogs are eating up the new grass that was planted on the side of the road. On the mountain biking trail there are several spots they found that were wallowed out. They may look at trapping some of the hogs to remove them. Mr. Hinesley reported they spoke with some law enforcement people and they purchased a remote trap for Weeks Bay. Law enforcement has a way to trap them using a monitor that operates remotely so when they see the hogs enter the trap they can hit a button and the gate closes.

Jackie saw the bald eagle and the nest is still on the edge of the water at Wolf Bay.

OLD BUSINESS

Discuss Master Plan with Cathy Gerachis of Goodwyn, Mills and Cawood – Mrs. Gerachis shared the revision based on the conversations during last month's meeting. She made a list of projects and started putting numbers on them and would like the Board to prioritize them. After tonight's meeting she will put the Master Plan in a report showing graphics and the guiding principles that the Board will use to make their choices and decisions. She will work directly with Ms. Gahagan to get the report in its final form. Once it is in its final form it will be a matter of the Board adopting the Master Plan and recommending it be adopted by Council.

The guiding principles have been grouped by topic, i.e. Environmental, Recreation (Programming/Activities), Education Objectives and Economic.

Guiding Principles

Environmental

- 1) Managing plant communities and wildlife habitats in a manner that is consistent with best management practices with each of the habitats.

- 2) Develop standards of acceptable use for each plant community and habitat
- 3) Monitoring impacts of existing as well as proposed activities
- 4) Adjusting habitat management strategies as necessary
- 5) Limiting the intensity of use as required to maintain a healthy habitat. Scheduling is a useful tool in managing adverse impacts. This allows the site to rest after large events, spacing things out. Each event will have its own potential positive and negative impacts. The Board will need to look at each one individually.
- 6) Locate areas of more intensive development outside the wetland areas and mitigate all wetland related impacts on site. Based on the current information they have showing a very large area of wetland on a ridge, the second phase of Philomene Holmes Blvd. has some real wetland impacts. The reality is that the wetlands in that area are significantly less than what is showing up on the information they are using and more easily permitted because it is less. Nothing could be good there.
- 7) There is an ongoing strategy of removing invasive species.

Recreation

- 1) Develop recreation opportunities that are compatible with plant communities and habitats. The Board is well on its way in terms of hiking and mountain biking activities.
- 2) Develop a process to assess the positive and negative impacts for proposed events or activities on those plant communities and wildlife habitats. This is the role the Board takes on as a whole and the balance of people who are used to running the events as well as people who have biology or wildlife sciences as an area of expertise helps you do that.
- 3) Locate proposed park features such as parking, pavilions, and access roads in a manner that minimizes adverse impacts on vegetation and wildlife habitats. The western road and entrance is located on a ridge, which is the best place to construct that type of road. It is efficient from the cost of construction perspective and it is going to be in an area that should have the least adverse impacts on the plant communities that are present.

In general, mountain biking is located on the southwest corner of the Preserve; disc golf is located on the edge of the wooded section in the northeast quadrant; as well as some remote camping areas; the shortest loop trail is 2.3 miles, the medium loop is 3 miles and the longest loop is over 4 miles. If walked together the mileage would be longer dependent upon the combined loops.

Education

The programming of educational activities that address all levels of interest including seniors, families, grades K-12, and pre-school. The Board is well on the way to doing these things.

Topics include:

- Water Quality
- Storm water management
- Bird Watching
- Wildlife Habitats

The current outdoor classroom is being utilized and the challenge will be to keep it as diverse and inclusive as possible.

Economic

- 1) Identifying revenue producing recreation based activities, which do not adversely impact the eco-systems or surrounding neighborhoods. This is being cognizant of the event size, number of vehicles and traffic implications.
- 2) Developing a cost structure for the use of GCNP as a venue that covers the costs/impacts of events on the park. At what point, in addition to the business license, is there a fee for the use of the park or fee charged to the high school sports leagues that are using it for cross-country training. It is about everyone being cognizant of the cost to the community in order to provide the resource.

Master Plan

In looking at the Master Plan you have the western gated entrance. The Board previously discussed having parking and a trailhead near this entrance to provide good access for the mountain bikers and it puts them close to their center of activity. There could even be a pavilion. The parking has approximately 40 spaces and could be parallel parking along the road for short term but Mrs. Gerachis discouraged it. The sooner the Board can designate an area for parking the better off and better behaved people will be and the Board can avoid some adverse consequences. There should be a sign with instructions for mountain biking that are specific to that as well as getting people set up for the walking trails.

After the road follows along the ridge it will tie into the interpretive center. The architects will finish the architectural drawing for the interpretive center in approximately two weeks. Then it will be in a position to be advertised and under construction within the year. The road and the parking in that area will be gravel and will still be in keeping with the low impact development strategies in how they managed water at that site and also maintained a state park kind of

character. There are approximately 40 parking spaces associated with the interpretive center for staff as well as events. It will also serve as a trailhead.

The Board also talked about having parking separate from the interpretive center but allowing another access point to trails because in the area south of the interpretive center there are as many as three walking trails that converge. This location would work for additional parking and pavilions. They drew in approximately 26 parking spaces. Now there are four different locations for parking across the park. People can choose where their jumping off point will be when they come to the park. They can choose to stay at the interpretive center, the eastern side of the park for the archery range, outdoor classroom, canoe launch, etc., the area south of the interpretive center for trails and the western entrance for mountain biking or trails.

Acting Chairman Patterson asked what the provisions just south of the interpretive center where the road crosses the stream. "Will there be a bridge?" Ms. Gahagan reported today they will be looking at two large box culverts where the stream is now in the pipe and then the road will be built up so that the elevation can stay as it is. Based upon the recommendation of the Corp of Engineers they will also do three to four oval hydrologic connection pipes further to the north of where the stream is now so if it rains water can funnel through to the flood plain. They will not build a giant bridge because they are looking at buses using the road and they think it would be the best solution in keeping the natural stream system in tack. Mrs. Gerachis reported the multiple pipes in the flood plain really help to manage the flow of the water. At that location you are back on the farm road and you are tracking across patterns that are well established on the property.

In reviewing the map Mrs. Gerachis pointed out a new connector road (2,400 linear feet in length) between the interpretive center and the eastern portion of the Preserve. Once the interpretive center is a hub of activity then the internal connection would be very important for park staff and the park user, even though you have Wolf Bay Drive. Mr. Singleton pointed out that the road is located in the heart of the disc golf course and he was not sure that the road would add that much to the communication. People use Wolf Bay Drive on a regular basis because it is easier and it has gone from no cars to eight to ten cars in that parking lot. He hated to see the Board interfere any more than necessary because the disc golfers and hikers are using it as an access point. Acting Chairman Patterson recommended that it be used just for staff and Mrs. Gerachis pointed out that staff is already using it and once you make it a dirt road it is another level of management to keep visitors off of it. Ms. Gahagan reported they would never be able to keep other people from using it. The point of having it was for the people who entered off the western entrance to be able to access the eastern portion of the park and keep people off Wolf Bay Drive

because that was one of the issues the neighborhoods had was to keep traffic off Wolf Bay Drive. The disc golf course will have to change and they are aware that several holes will have to move as this project progresses and potentially they may even add an additional course. There will have to be a lot of changes.

Mrs. Gerachis reported in the area of the interpretive center they are showing a large pavilion in the field across from it as it would seem that would be a good location where you could have larger numbers of people. You also have access to facilities and restrooms. The raptor center will be an opportunity that may present itself and the location that was proposed at Graham Creek Nature Preserve. They suggest that it be located on the parcel opposite of the interpretive center. It could move up closer to the road but part of it is understanding the programming and rehab activities that need to take place there so she located it further away from Wolf Bay Drive.

Mr. Hinesley asked what the raptor center would look like, i.e. just pens or something different. Mr. Singleton reported that if it looks like the others it will include pens with shelters. Mr. Hinesley reported they have one at Oak Mountain but he hasn't seen it but expressed his concerns about the looks and it being next to a nice interpretive center. Ms. Tremble reported there is a raptor center at Oak Mountain that consists of a building where they do rehab but also has trails around it that have huge enclosures and pens for the birds that are at a half-way point in recovery.

Mrs. Gerachis reported that she utilized the space to back up to the cell tower where some of the raptor center things needed to take place. The property is a little over two acres, which is probably more than they need. They still have a need for a connector road. This is intended as a general area for the Board to look at and once the Board has a more specific proposal and if it becomes a reality then you will be in a better position to ask good questions and figure out how it can be a positive addition to the Preserve.

The existing pavilion located on the eastern side of the property is set up with five or six 90° parking spaces. Based upon the existing fencing you could use curb stops to add more parking spaces. This will give the visitor more information about where you want them to park and keeping it very informal under the trees. However, when you have more people and trying to accommodate larger groups you need to provide more direction. You should be able to park 60 – 65 vehicles. That would be 40 parking at the interpretive center, approximately 60 between the two parking lots on the Philomene Holmes Blvd. Extension for approximately 160 to 170 parking spaces distributed throughout the park. In distributing the parking spaces it is really about putting parking resources where you want people to be jumping off or staging them because it

is a drop and leave function. People will park and do their activity. Most people won't park on the east side of the park and do their activity on the west side of the park. The only reason would be if you are going mountain biking and the children would have birthday party on the other side of the park or you would canoe/kayak the same day you are mountain biking. The road system is not set up to facilitate that but the purpose is to have multiple jumping off places for people to experience different activities and features of the park and to facilitate staffs access for maintenance, management and policing.

Reviews of a photo of an ADA walking trail tied to the interpretive center across the wetlands and another photo of a road in a national park shows how the Preserve could look because they are very similar in vegetation. The photo was from a national park service road in the outer banks. You get the sense of what a forested landscape looks like and how they are managing the understory. There are grass swells cleared to a point where the forest comes up and then you can manage the understory on a couple of different levels. This is what your landscape looks like.

Today Mrs. Gerachis takes away from today's discussion is the internal connector road needs to be discussed as optional, proposed, dashed in? Mr. Hinesley recommended staff only to be barricaded off when they need it. If you could keep it grass it would be best. He felt they needed to use a base of crushed limestone and stay away from asphalt within the park as much as possible, especially around the creek. Mr. Singleton reported in the Conecuh National Forest they have almost the same thing and they have posted 35 mph speed signs and that is not what he sees going down the road. Gravel helps to keep the speed limits rather than having to keep a traffic cop at the Park. Mrs. Gerachis reported that it may be the road is one of the features that if staff is using it a lot then it needs to be a gravel road. Even at that point it would still be a trail. Mr. Hinesley agreed with Mr. Singleton that maybe it should be dashed line because he couldn't see an improved connector road.

Mrs. Gerachis has started identifying different elements in the park and started to put dollar amounts attached to them as well as identifying potential funding sources. This is not a complete list and in terms of looking at priorities the list is her interpretation of looking at a sequence of things that might happen. Philomene Holmes Blvd., Phase 1 was completed last year. Philomene Holmes Blvd., Phase 2 is an unpaved road designated as a high priority. Trailhead parking #1 near the interpretive center was a medium priority as opposed to the trail head parking near the Mountain Biking feature. It was higher because it gives you the western access once the extension is in. She noted a correction to be made on the map. The 20 spaces should have been at the interpretive center and 40 spaces at the trailhead near the mountain biking. Ms. Gahagan reported she will be speaking with Public Works when they build Philomene Holmes Blvd.,

Phase 2 and they could add the parking as they are building without any real additional costs as they are using some of the extra material they had from Phase 1 stocked piled. They are going to try to get that put in immediately as they start building. Mr. Singleton reported that would be an immediate way to take some traffic off Wolf Bay Drive.

In the ADA Trails they showed a quarter mile loop and an extension out to a mile. The ADA trails will be paved or board walked depending on the wetland situation so the cost per linear foot will be a lot more than some others but after she looked at the trail layout and all the water crossings the numbers need to go up because of the bridges that might be needed. That project is very eligible for recreational trails grants and land and water conservation grants. Mrs. Gahagan reported the City is not doing any of those grants. RTP is Recreational Trails and are a 20/80 match and LWCF is Land and Water Conservation Grants are a 50/50 match. Both of them go through ADECA. Mrs. Gerachis continued to review the "Implementation" plan. The costs for the pavilions will depend on the materials used, i.e. wood vs. other materials. Mr. Hinesley reported there are some funds tied into the water trails that are available.

Mrs. Gerachis reported the document is a working document for the Board so from year to year it will change by adding/deleting projects and change priorities based on grant funds availability, donations, certain activities or unanticipated activities presenting themselves. In order for the Board to have the most flexibility she did not see the document being added to the Master Plan going to City Council. It allows the Board flexibility relative to implementation and then set priorities. Mr. Hinesley asked if the priorities could be omitted because he felt it would be good for the Council to see the project description, function, estimated costs and even potential funding source. Mrs. Gerachis reported she was not intending to hide the document from Council but she doesn't want it combined with the Master Plan. Mr. Hinesley felt that the priority should not be listed but the implementation list with all the other items should be presented to Council and then the work plan would still be flexible. Mrs. Southern recommended it be submitted under a separate cover indicating it was just a work plan to be changed as needed.

Mrs. Gerachis reported she would like to have a PDF format of the Master Plan back by the next meeting for the Board to review. It can then be distributed to the Board. Acting Chairman Patterson reported she and her staff did a great job in stimulating the thought process and stimulated discussion. She thanked him and reported the first year of the Board is very important in discovering what decisions need to be made and figuring out every event that happens doesn't need the Board's approval but understanding the schedule, the frequency and the intensity of events and looking at holistically as the Board will be doing for a year you will know so much more about the activities and the level of uses at

the park a year from now and will be a lot more confident in evaluating how the park grows in its use and popularity. There are a lot of young children visiting the park and having lots of positive experiences and they will be repeat visitors. Mr. Hinesley asked for clarification on the adoption of the Master Plan. Mrs. Southern reported when the Board is at the point of adopting the plan they would vote making a recommendation to adopt the Master Plan by resolution. Ms. Gahagan reported she should have the plans for the interpretive center as well for the next meeting so it could be taken to Council. She wants their blessing on the plans before going to Council and she will be on the February's Planning Commission.

Reminder next meeting will be February 5, 2015

Mr. Hinesley reported he would not be able to attend the March meeting as he will be out of town.

VISITOR COMMENTS: Ms. Gahagan reminded the Board not to forget January 17th is Heritage Day and Jackie will be working with all the shrimpers and fishermen from 10:00 a.m. until noon. They will have "critters" for the children to see and touch and talk about the history of the industry.

Vice Chairman Patterson reported the Grand Opening of the Archery Range on the 19th was nice and they had just missed the rain. Ms. Gahagan reported the range has been used a lot and people are asking a lot of questions on Facebook.

ADJOURN

Hearing no further comments Mr. Hinesley made a motion to adjourn and Mr. Closson seconded the motion. The vote passed unanimously. The meeting adjourned at 6:40 p.m.

/s/Victoria Southern, CMC
City Clerk/Recording Secretary