

MINUTES

GRAHAM CREEK NATURE PRESERVE ADVISORY BOARD

407 E. LAUREL AVENUE

FOLEY, ALABAMA

CONFERENCE ROOM

APRIL 2, 2015

5:30 P.M.

MEETING

Call to Order/Roll Call

Chairman Zana Price called the meeting to order at 5:30 p.m. Board members present: Tim Closson, Tommy Patterson, Homer Singleton, and Greg Knight. Absent: Chad Watkins and Phillip Hinesley. Others present: Katy Taylor, Acting Recording Secretary, and Jacqueline Trimble.

MINUTES

Approve Minutes of March 5, 2015

Mr. Patterson made a motion to approve the minutes as submitted and Mr. Knight seconded the motion. The vote passed unanimously.

GUESTS

Friends of Graham Creek – Mrs. Gahagan reported that none of them showed up for the meeting but the Board really needs to get with them soon. They have their non-profit status and have received their first donation. It was \$1,000 from the Foley Women's Club the Mad Hatters. Gulf Shores Elementary came out for a field trip Monday and Tuesday. They had a donation but Mrs. Gahagan has not received any paperwork yet so she did not know the amount. The Friends are accepting donations and then they can be earmarked for a project or whatever. If the City needs funds for an educational program or a field trip this is a good avenue to receive those funds for use. When the City receives money then it goes into the General Fund and it is very difficult to receive a donation and use it for a specific purpose. Mrs. Gahagan is looking at field trip for Swift School because most of the students cannot afford a field trip. The disc golf club gave some donations to purchase some books to staff their library with education resources. The Gulf Shores Garden Club called her today and they are purchasing plants and coming out to plant them. They wanted to come and talk but she must have gotten diverted. Mrs. Gahagan reported they have not given her any information about how donations can be accepted. They need a contribution form too. Maybe they can come to the next meeting to give the Advisory Board a report.

Mr. Patterson reported that he hoped that they would be available to be tour guides. Most of the people live in the area and are retired. If someone wants to

walk a trail but is not familiar then they would have a guide. Mrs. Gahagan agreed with Mr. Patterson. She could give some of the brochures to Councilman Trawick because he has an upcoming meeting with them. She also mentioned they could help with play days with the children so that Ms. Trimble and Mrs. Gahagan aren't always confined to the days.

NEW BUSINESS

Discuss Rental Fees

Mrs. Gahagan reported bids received on the interpretive center were higher than expected so she needs to cut a few things. She cut the removable wall in the large area (2500 sq. ft.), which was \$25,000. When you look at the area being divided into two class rooms Mrs. Gahagan felt that it would be better left open to one size. Due to the change she reviewed the rental fees using data from Baldwin and Mobile Counties with other facilities with similar amenities she scaled it down. To begin with the rental rates need to be as reasonable as possible to gain citizens' confidence and knowledge of what will be offered and after a year review the rates and modify them as needed.

Mr. Knight asked if the wall was something that could be added at a later date. Mrs. Gahagan reported the beams will be left in place so that if at a later date they wanted to add the wall it could still be done. There are alternatives to the built-in removal wall but they didn't have cost estimates so there may be changes done later. They need to see how popular the center will be. It is still comparable to 5-Rivers data because it is an outdoor venue. Their weddings are a lot higher but they have a waterfront vista view and the City's center will be forestry.

Mr. Patterson asked if the City had other pavilions. Mrs. Gahagan reported the City rents Heritage Park Pavilion. The Kids Park Pavilion is on a first come first serve basis. If you want to reserve it you have to pay for it. She already is booked for two months of birthday parties.

Mrs. Gahagan further reported the evening use would only be for the center. If they wanted to have a sunset wedding they would do that as the wedding venue and move to the center for the reception but it would still be considered a day use. The Civic Center rents for \$450 for non-residents, \$350 for residents and it has a full kitchen. If they have alcohol there is an extra fee because of all the extra liability and they have to pay for security.

Mrs. Gahagan reviewed the fees with David Thompson, Recreation Director, and he was good with the fees. She would like the fees to be in place for the next fiscal year, which begins October 1, 2015. By the time the center is built then there will be fees established. By using the proposed rates she is looking at raising \$1 million in eight years and this is based on 5-Rivers.

Mr. Patterson made a motion to carry over this item in order to give the board members that are absent the opportunity to review the rates but to be voted on by September 1, 2015. Mr. Singleton seconded the motion and the vote passed unanimously.

OLD BUSINESS

Update on Interpretive Center

Mrs. Gahagan reported the City went out to bid on the interpretive center and there were seven bids. The low bidder was Sycamore Construction in the amount of \$1,125,000; however, the contractor's license only allowed him to bid up to \$1 million so he was not qualified to bid more \$1 million and therefore disqualified. The next bid came in at \$1,250,000 by Youngblood out of Mobile. Goodwyn, Mills and Cawood have done multiple contracts with Youngblood and they are very successful. This came in over \$250,000 over the budgeted amount. The City is looking at value engineering the project so it would come in under 10% of the bid, which is allowable under the State Bid Laws. The architect is thinking about removing the ballast lighting in the walkway by the parking area. Light poles can be put in at a future date because the utilities will be run for the pedestals. The ballast lighting came in at \$15,000. The land work, parking lot, driveway and handicapped parking were all add alternates. Because the base and site work came in so high, the City will be doing that in house by City employees. This item will be on the Council agenda this Monday with the hopes they can value engineer the project enough to move forward with a very good contractor. They could begin construction by the end of April.

Consider resolution approving recommendation to Council to locate a championship disc golf course

Mrs. Gahagan reported she printed out a map for the board member's review. The hot pink color is the existing course. She spoke with the DMWB, who have been coordinating the disc golf events. They really want to use the southern field as the new course because it provides a lot of ground, like the existing course. There are trees that are scattered throughout and areas in the dense vegetative area to the north where they mowed down popcorn trees. If they put a basket in the middle of it then the disc golfers will keep the popcorn trees from growing. This field would be an ideal spot and there are no wetlands in that area. The access would be at the Mountain Bike trail. There is already a footbridge across the stream and the Mountain Bikers have made a second footbridge that are anchored in to get across the mud hole with a power line crossing the middle of it.

Mr. Patterson reported that he loved disc golf but his biggest concern is to continue to put sports venues in the Nature Preserve. He contends that if they put the sports in then they will come just for the sports instead of seeing the nature preserve. He felt that the Board was drifting from the nature preserve

side and putting in sports venues to attract more people. He referred to the Master Plan in judging the events that would go on at the preserve and in his mind could not justify that it has a good environmental impact because the towers and concrete pads are a detraction from the natural environment. There aren't a lot of places that you can go and see nature in its genuine state prior to improvements. He wants to protect the area, be a good steward of the area and not put sports venues there.

Mrs. Gahagan reported the proposed disc golf course is approximately 40 acres. Chairman Price and Mr. Knight agreed of the importance of having a good balance of both so they complement each other because if you don't have people coming out for sports they wouldn't get to know the beauty of the preserve. Mr. Closson reported that most of the PDGA tournaments are either a two course or three course weekend. That is the idea of the two courses, one being a professional course and the other a beginner course. You would have different divisions in the tournament and they would move them from course to course so that you can have 140-150 playing and would be able to spread them out. Mrs. Gahagan reported by having two courses allows the City to have a two-day event and with Fairhope having a course people would stay in Foley because we have the prettier course.

Mrs. Gahagan reported Mr. Barber's property located to the east of the Preserve is being leased for hunting and they have had multiple occasions where hunters are sitting on the edge and then wandering into those fields. It is because people do not go to the fields unless you are the jogger that goes early in the morning or the dog walkers late in the afternoon. Very few people go on the south side of the park. The Mountain Bikers have almost run off all the wild hogs because they just disappeared, but they are keeping the four-wheeler element out on that side. It is just getting less desirable people out to the south end of the park. This course probably will not be played that much unless we do have a tournament. Mr. Closson reported Donnie and William have three fundraisers scheduled this year for benches, concrete pads, and give back to the classroom. It is our local disc golfers that really want to have a nice place. Mrs. Gahagan reported that one of the disc golfers brings his mower out and mows a fairway so the City doesn't have to mow it.

Chairman Price asked if Mrs. Gahagan had checked with the Corp of Engineers. Mrs. Gahagan reported there are no wetlands or impacts to anything sensitive. The only things on the parcel are popcorn trees and patches of Cogon grass. There are four walls as obstacles.

Mrs. Gahagan needs approval on boundaries to work within for the designer to develop the course.

Mr. Singleton made a motion to approve the location Mrs. Gahagan has outlined and Mr. Knight seconded the motion. Mr. Patterson voted nay. The motion passed by a majority vote.

Mrs. Gahagan reported looking at very long range planning the only other items they are looking at for the park is possibly a ropes course. They are not sure if it is even feasible to be placed in the bottom land swamp area. The other item would be a boulder wall because there isn't a need for a huge footprint of an impact. It would depend on if they are moderately priced. Most important is to get the trails in really good shape and maintain them. They need a few more pavilions, maybe some more horseshoes or corn hole games.

Mr. Patterson asked if there were supposed to be unleashed dogs in the park. Mrs. Gahagan reported the City Council approved an amendment to the dog ordinance approving certain areas within the City for dogs to be off leash. This came about from the new dog park that is going in and other parks where dogs will be doing field tests and training. There was a discussion regarding keeping the dogs on the leash.

EARTH DAY

Mrs. Gahagan reported Earth Day Festival and Scramble is April 18th and they need help with both. They were approached by University of South Alabama public relations class and they are working with the Coastal Wildlife Rescue Center to do marketing and projects to help them fundraise. They wanted to do a festival and she told them about Earth Day. The Scramble will be held that morning and they had all the awards donated. They have to do t-shirts and finish the challenges. They will use the red trail, excluding the Pitcher Plant Bog. The challenges will all be park or environmental related. Challenges will include items related to activities in the park, a family friendly activity, a couple of walls, or facts on the park. The Scramble will begin at 9:00 a.m. and finish approximately 10:30 – 11:00 because it is only about two miles to the pavilion to the furthest challenge and back. They will have only 50-55 teams of three and will shut down registration when they hit that many.

The University of South Alabama will bring in two to three college bands. A family from Leisure Lakes used to do puppet shows up north and they will do that. Every hour there will be something going on. The Key Club will be selling drinks and snacks. There will be face painting and a few environmental displays and some activities and some nature tours. They will ride them down the trail, across the field and down by the pitcher plant bog, do the loop and stop at the rescue center to paint hands and paint the fence with hands. These are graduate students who have a good funding source to help them along. They have a bunch of things planned, i.e. a mini disc golf tournament using only the holes by the bird center to see if the score would be and a mini corn hole tournament by

the bird center as well. They can raise some money for the bird sanctuary because they are very busy but it will be low key and figure a couple of hundred will turn out for that like they did in the past. They also need volunteers.

Archery Tournament

February 16th there will be an archery tournament and all the new roads will be in. There is enough parking for the event and she will close off the road. They will also use the abandoned subdivision for parking so they can just walk across the street.

REMINDERS

The next meeting will be May 7, 2015.

VISITOR COMMENTS: There were no comments to report.

ADJOURN

Hearing no further comments Mr. Patterson made a motion to adjourn and Mr. Knight seconded the motion. The vote passed unanimously and the meeting adjourned at 6:35 p.m.

/s/Victoria Southern, CMC
Recording Secretary