

City of Lawrence
Parks and Recreation Advisory Board, Special Meeting
June 20, 2019 minutes

MEMBERS PRESENT: Chair Marilyn Hull, Bart Littlejohn, Pat Phillips, Jacki Becker, Pat Collette, John Blazek, Sandy Hull, Val Renault, and John Nalbandian

MEMBERS ABSENT:

STAFF PRESENT: Derek Rogers, Roger Steinbrock, Lee Ice, Mark Hecker, and Penny Holler

PUBLIC PRESENT: Malcolm L., Michael Davidson, Ken Easthouse, Stuart Boley, Joey Hentzler, Harrison Baker, Courtney Shipley, Melinda H., Creed Shepard, Craig Patterson, Rochelle Valverde, Mandy Enfield, Eric Kirkendall, Fally Afani, Sarah Kunen, Meg Williams, Miguel Roel, Frank Janzen, Justine Burton, Lisa Larsen

I. Meeting called to order by Hull

II. Public Comments

Melinda Henderson has concerns about the closing of the Community Building. She was troubled with the idea of having two recreation centers on the west side of town and only one on the east side of town.

Fally Afani has been using the cardio room at the Community Building for the past eight years and her kids have been using the cardio room as well. She feels that a lot of people depend on that center and it's a very vital facility for east Lawrence and an historical facility.

Eric Kirkendall has used the Community Building and feels it should stay accessible to the public at no fee. He was concerned about the people that use it for showering. Feels that there will be a lot of people in Lawrence who will feel the same.

Tom has been in Lawrence for about nine months and feels the Community Building is a tremendous resource. It serves a very different population with very different needs than those who use the two facilities on the west side of town. Thinks that the other centers should not be financing the poor planning that was done for the sports pavilion which is what he feels is happening.

Michael Davidson is urging the board to really look at this deeply and listen to everybody.

Justine Burton has been in Lawrence for a number of years. Feels the Community Building is beautiful and thinks there are plenty of people in Lawrence that can put their minds together to figure out what the facility can be used for if not a recreation center.

Harrison Baker – Thinks developers from outside of Lawrence are coming in and not following or seeing what Lawrencians want. If health outcome can be determined by zip code and your quality of life and life expectancy can all be determined by five digits, concerned that public entities should help to dissolve those disparities. Feels the city needs to make sure that it has a duty to its residents that they keep them healthy and safe.

Derrick M – Father of two boys whose family has used the Community Building for a long time, including for showers and for his son to play basketball with his friends as a safe place to go. Worried that taking away the Community Building takes one less place away for them to go. Keeping them off the street which is important. As a mental health professional, the mental health implications of being able to exercise and how that affects mental health is a really big deal, having a facility in this prime location is priceless.

Miguel L – Has used the Community Building for 1 ½ years, four days a week consistently. Sees plenty of people using the facility at all times, local basketball teams, dance classes, aerobics classes and it's a lively center. Feels that it's a resource for those that don't have the means to access other resources for physical activity and to socialize and have access for showers.

Sarah Thomas – A Lawrencean that has used the Community Building and stated that a lot of work has been put into the facility. Feels we need a place for marginalized people and places that are safe for people of color, for transient communities, low-income and children. To have this place so close and have this resource for our community is of vital importance. Thinks it's a beautiful building and it's a valuable resource that we need to hold onto.

Nancy – She quoted the mission statement and suggested adding the word "all" to the Lawrence Community.

Joey Hentzler – Candidate for city commission, inquired about the breakdown of demographics of use per facility. Concerned that when the homeless shelter was moved from downtown, it was a lost resource and the loss of the Community Building would be similar.

Lee Ice responded that the neighborhood recreation centers have sign in sheets with names and zip codes. Right now we don't have accurate data. We ran that data at the Sports Pavilion with the key cards and the most users were in the 66044 zip code.

Frank Jantzen -- Goes into the Community Building for exercise daily. Also wants to see the room downstairs continue to be utilized.

Karen – Feels that proximity makes a difference on daily workouts and it's nice to have something so close.

III. Update from LPRD staff on budget

Rogers reported the budget is the city manager's budget, Parks and Recreation had to balance the expenditures and revenue. Now it belongs to the city commission. From this process forward, we are in the support mode to the city commission.

Rogers explained that the recreation budget used to be supported by the General Fund (mostly derived from property taxes) and a portion of the county-wide sales tax. Beginning in the 2012 budget, property taxes were no longer a major supporter of the recreation fund.

Instead, a larger portion of the county sales tax went to recreation. However, the sales tax has been flat. If we were to have extra, it would go into the reserve funds. As we move forward in the process, we would like to see something sustainable for the long run rather than fix a budget or two. Rogers went on to explain that the recreation budget is funded by a combination of the general fund, the sales tax and user fees. Rogers proceeded to go over the budget. The sales tax remains flat yet our costs go up every year.

Blazek suggested to look at personnel and see what we have and what we can get along without.

The board and staff went over information regarding the sales tax.

Public Comment – Melinda Henderson inquired about SPL and questioned how it was presented to the public initially. Thinks that there would be plenty of money to pay 1.2 million for 20 years on the bond for SPL. She thought there is supposed to be another \$300,000 every year. Asked if we are meeting the goals that were set for it with regard to it being an economic development project.

Hecker on the debt financing. The \$300,000 is the difference between the operational revenue about a 65% fee supported and 35% tax supported. We're making about \$650,000-\$700,000 revenue at SPL.

Nalbandian mentioned that SPL seems to stimulate a lot of negatives. We need to remember that we had a chance to build a major sports facility in Centennial Park, but it was rejected by the neighbors. Then we wanted to do something around 15th and Kasold and that was

rejected by the neighbors. Suggested that the initial goal wasn't go build out west but it was the only place that was undeveloped.

Ken Easthouse – Asked about why would you eliminate something that is revenue generated? Also wondered what portion of the user fees \$175,000 is net cost? Rogers answered that the intention is not to eliminate a revenue generating position and that the \$175,000 is net cost.

Craig Patterson – Thought there might be more equity amongst the users because of their direct benefit of it.

KT Walsh – Thinks that for the downtown masterplan, people are talking about needing permanent affordable housing and wouldn't it be awesome if Tenants to Homeowner's, the Housing Authority and the City and the community work together so there was a place for lower-income people or even part of it and they would have access to workouts and classes. KT is also a member of the Trusts for Public Lands that goes all over the nation building parks and doing studies. Wants us to consider this for Lawrence.

Harrison Baker – Confused as to how a city with a budget of \$235,000,000 can't afford \$700,000 -- .3% of the budget according to his calculations.

Eric Kirkendall – Feels for the department as a retired public servant trying to operate within a budget and doesn't blame anyone for where we are. Worried that we built a fancy facility out west and other things are more "bare bones." Would like to encourage the board to think about the equity in the building. Asked about the total operating plus debt retirement costs of the Community Building and equity versus the SPL? Thinks nobody in the private sector is going to do that and that it might be worth considering outsourcing management operations to a private sector business or it might be worth considering leasing it. Thinks that it's not fair to hurt the people that live around here and a lot of poor people that use the facility to solve a budget problem.

Mandy Enfield – Mentioned the observation of one entrance and five exits is always brought up regarding the Community Building but she hasn't heard much about possible solutions.

IV. Health Equity Impact Assessment – Subcommittee Report

Marilyn Hull reported that representatives from the Lawrence Douglas County Health Department made a presentation about the community health equity study that was done in recent years.

The sub-committee consists of Sandy Hull, Jacki Becker and Val Renault with Lee Ice and Penny Holler in attendance. Sarah Hartsig with the health department was also in attendance. Definition of health equity – Everyone regardless of social advantage or disadvantage has a fair and just opportunity to be as healthy as possible by addressing social inequities in opportunities and resources needed to be healthy.

We're looking at the policy of fee structure, user fees and how that would affect the community. How it might affect across the demographics of special seniors, low-income, fixed income, even location of proximity to how close you might be to a facility. We did the positive and negative impact. There is a need for the facility security maintenance card – the access card that gets you into facilities, that collects data demographic information. Once we get that information, then you can start to develop overlays of do we charge user fees, what might they be, how can we make it equitable across the entire community.

Renault said that when you get into the logistics of how to charge the fees, we were looking at higher fees for the facilities that offer more. Also talked about soliciting more scholarships. Becker said that equity is a big initial part of this and the initial card could help gather information so that when it comes time for the next round of budgets we have something that we can bring to the table that is proof to what the people of Lawrence are doing and wanting, are they utilizing our facilities and hopefully we can build from there. Any type of fee is going to affect half of our community that is not probably not on the west side. More information is

the dire key to get more information to know where people are going. The summary of findings are: Fee structure be postponed for at least a year after implementation of the access card so we can gather that data from the cards. A robust community engagement process be conducted on the issue. This would allow the fee structure to be informed by demographic data and community input which would increase chances of equity. Implementing the electronic security cards to collect sufficient data about our users would gather address, zip code, age, race, and income level. We know that some people are sensitive to providing that information and that will always be a stumbling block. We want to maintain free access for use of 18 years of age and younger and explore the possibility of payment plan for low-income individuals.

Blazek complimented the subcommittee on their work in such a short amount of time. He also suggested that if children are on free/reduced lunch with the school district, and citizens are on government subsidies, they need to provide that information and let them have free admission into the facilities, give them a free admission card.

Littlejohn concurred with what Blazek said. Reiterated that we need more information in general and get more community input and suggested surveys to see what the community would like.

Harrison Baker – Enjoyed this report. This should not be rushed into. Doesn't feel that user fees should ever exist, especially for a public service like a wading pool or a community center. Concerned about the focus of security, understand the idea of making sure the citizen is safe. A door lock that you can unlock with a card will not prevent an act of violence from occurring at all. If that were the case, we would have less school shootings where there were doors that are locked by key cards.

Becker clarified that the keycards are for tallying data only and not for security purposes.

Sandy Hull reported that another aspect of having the security cards would be if a youth patron gets into trouble at one of the facilities and gets kicked out and shows up at another facility, by having that card and swiping it at another facility, staff will know that there is a problem.

V. Draft Letter Review – Response to City Commission

Second subcommittee that was formed at the last meeting was tasked with providing some written advice to the city commission based on where we are in understanding the issues. Hull did the main writing of the letter with input and editing from Phillips and Littlejohn.

The statement begins with saying we had less than a week's notice between the commission asking us for advice and our June 10th meeting. The approach we took was to send an interim response was sent to just say this is where we are in our thinking right now, here is our concern and here are the pros and cons of the fee proposal. The statement of the overall concern states that the advisory board had to approach this in a very hasty way and it seemed also possible that staff could have been asked to approach this in a rather hasty way. Some of the documents that the board looked at were composed cost reductions or revenue enhancements. The assumptions behind those seemed uncertain and the full set of outcomes also seemed unknown. In the absence of good data, further studies, etc. we see a real downside of the department running the risk of creating bad will, missing the budget targets that have been set or more importantly reducing access to the center.

On the matter of the facility access cards and user fees, pros and cons, we noted many of the things that have been discussed including improved security, usage data gathering, some opportunity for new net revenue, although the amount is unknown. We have also noted the parks and recreation masterplan did include adopting a cost recovery philosophy and rubric that would attempt to fairly distribute the costs of providing parks and recreation throughout the community. Some through general taxation and some through user fees and so forth. Those were the pluses.

The cons: cost barriers to facility use. It's going to be a barrier for some people whenever we charge fees. This policy will create some additional inequities for the public. Staff response that we have received seems inadequate. Staff will work with local non-profits to try and help folks get access, but not every low-income/marginalized person is connected to a non-profit. The board has not seen any proposal for how everyone in the community, that might need help, would get help. That is a major weakness. The equity subcommittee talked about how the pricing structure will hurt lower income users who can't front the money is a general concern of ours. The full cost of system implementation is unknown. An earlier proposal included the gross revenues for these fees minus the cost of implementing them and the department was asked to take the costs of implementing them off. That doesn't make any management sense. Hull doesn't see how the board can support that.

The final statement in the advice to the city commission is a request for more time and access to data gathering and analysis resources. The health department has offered a technical assistant to the advisory board if we want to do a more full blown health equity assessment that would actually involve surveying patrons and potential patrons, including those who may not be able to go online and quickly fill out a survey. We can do a more robust study but we would have to have staff resources and other technical resources to do that. There are some other advantages to additional time, we can relook at the master plan and see what it says about financial choices and fees, get more community input, explore more equitable ways to structure the fees and explore more systemic methods to waive fees for low-income residents. Hull asked if the board should move forward with the interim statement as its written or some version of it, or do they move forward with the recommendations of the equity committee? Are there other options?

Board members discussed pros and cons, adding statements, fee structures.

Blazek suggested that the board make a very strong statement about equity concerns. A second statement about the necessity of more time to study the equity concerns.

The statement to the city commission that these are the two main points that we want to make and do we want to make a third statement that says if you instruct us to do so, we will lead or continue this work.

Nalbandian would like to know when the most appropriate time, when the city commission is going to address this item, if they are. Some of the board members might want to be there. Advisory Board will submit a request to be on the agenda for the July 9 city commission meeting.

Blazek recommended the Board Chair speak on behalf of the advisory board; seconded by Sandy Hull; **motion passed 8-0**

VI. Advisory Board Questions of Staff, if any

Steinbrock asked that if there are any emails that are not in the packet to please forward those on to him.

VII. Next Steps

VIII. Other:

Next Board Meeting – 5:30p.m. Monday, July 8