

Recreation Committee Meeting

March 24, 2025

A meeting of the Recreation Committee was held on this date beginning at 4:00 p.m. over video conference call.

Councilmembers Present: Councilmember Caroline Parker (Chair), Councilmember Jim McBride, Councilmember Kevin Shealy, Councilmember Keith Waring (*joined 4:17 p.m.*), and Mayor William S. Cogswell, Jr.

Staff Present: Jason Kronsberg, Director, Parks; Laurie Yarbrough, Director, Recreation; Elizabeth Dieck, Chief of Staff; Amy Wharton, Chief Financial Officer; Julia Copeland, Corporation Counsel; Magalie Creech, Assistant Corporation Counsel; Hampton Logan, Executive Assistant and Special Projects Manager – Chief of Staff; Jennifer Cook, Clerk of Council; and Wanda Stepp, Clerk of Council's Office (recording).

Also Present:

Chairwoman Parker called the meeting to order.

Chairwoman Parker opened the meeting with a moment of silence.

Approval of Minutes

On a motion by Councilmember Shealy, seconded by Councilmember McBride, the Committee voted unanimously to approve the minutes of the February 24, 2025 Recreation Committee meeting.

Public Participation:

None.

Old Business:

- a. **Recreation Ordinance review/update:**
- b. **Recreation commission appointments and meeting schedule:**

Chairwoman Parker asked the Committee to direct Legal to look at the ordinance and talk about the Recreation Commission. She would like to see an appointment from each district. If every district had an appointment on that Commission, met regularly, and reported out to the Committee quarterly, she thought that could go a long way within the City. If the Committee felt that the Commission could be helpful, that was what she was looking for. She knew the Committee was the point of contact for each district, but they had a lot of parks and different people in different parks doing different things. There was pickleball, rugby, and ultimate Frisbee in all areas and the Recreation Commission could be a vital tool to help the Recreation Committee moving forward. If there was no opposition, she would like to direct Legal to look at the ordinance to see if it needed updating, discuss it with the Mayor's Office, and bring it back next month. Ms. Copeland said she would be happy to do that. She asked Chairwoman Parker if her specific request was the makeup of the Commission. Chairwoman Parker said that was correct. She knew there had been discussion as to it not being very active in the past, but people had already applied. She thought

if every district could appoint someone and they could utilize those applications to where each Councilmember made an appointment and had a chair, meeting schedule, and reported to the Committee quarterly. Mayor Cogswell said his only concern was that they were also in the process of amending a lot of commissions. They had an appointment for every Councilmember, but they couldn't get appointments in some cases where Councilmembers couldn't find people to serve. That was his only caution. The other thing was when they had a commission over 13, it got to be a little less productive in his experience, but he did think it could be a valuable platform for people that cared about the parks. He was open to discussing it with broader Council and he would get with Legal.

c. Volunteer and participant/parents' surveys:

Ms. Yarbrough said at the end of the winter youth sports season, which they had just finished, they had about 3,000 kids that participated in that season. They had 436 surveys returned to them and that was about a 15% turn-in rate, which was not bad for a participation survey. They had gotten good remarks for the most part. They did get hammered in not having enough gymnasiums to allow children to have more practices during the season for skill development, which was something they heard every season. She got a lot of comments on how good some coaches were and a couple that weren't as good. Their coordinators would be meeting with those coaches and talking to them about the feedback from parents in terms of their communication styles or the fact that they couldn't do everything they had said they were going to do. They got good information back, and overall, it was a good season. People thought their programs were priced at a good place and it gave them and their family a great value. They would be doing it for the spring surveys, as well. Chairwoman Parker asked Ms. Yarbrough if she went through all 400 or did someone compile them. Ms. Yarbrough said they were compiled by the coordinators by each geographic area, so in this case, everybody that did the basketball and flag football season. They went ahead and combined all their comments, so they would see a percentage of things such as how many people gave them a 3, 4, or 5 which was good, above average, and great in terms of the fee structure. That was like 95%. Every now and then, they got one or two people that said the City charged too much. The biggest thing was where they asked people to share their comments and not just giving feedback on scores. If they needed to work with any coaches if they wanted to coach again, maybe they could help them by how they organized a practice or maybe parents didn't know about practices in a timely manner. It did give them opportunities to give their coaches and volunteers direct feedback. If they didn't want someone to coach again because of problems, it also gave them documentation. Chairwoman Parker asked Ms. Yarbrough to share the data. Ms. Yarbrough said across the board they got hammered in every area in not having enough gymnasium space. Johns Island had no gym, so they would have been hammered there, as well. It went along the geographic areas of things like that, but she was happy to compile that.

d. Discussion re: QR Code at City parks for citizens to utilize and provide feedback:

Chairwoman Parker asked if anything had been initiated at City parks to provide additional feedback. She didn't know if that was something the Committee wanted to see. She knew other Councilmembers had asked her for it. She didn't see why they wouldn't have the technology or the ability to implement that at some of the parks. She knew they had a Citizens Services page. Perhaps, they could create a QR Code to put at some of the community parks especially some of the ones that didn't have staff regularly. She didn't know if that was something they could help direct staff to do if they thought that would be helpful. Councilmember McBride said it sounded like it would be a constituent scanning the QR Code to find out information about the park and give feedback and things like that. Chairwoman Parker said that was it. Councilmember Shealy

said that kind of automation would be good. Mayor Cogswell said they had made a request to IT to get the feasibility of that and he didn't think they had heard back, but he would check on it. Ms. Dieck said she would follow up with IT. Chairwoman Parker said they would check back in April.

e. Discussion regarding status of Longborough Dock negotiations:

Ms. Copeland said they communicated the Mayor's offer to give the neighborhood association a share toward the construction. The neighborhood association spoke to their lawyer and the board had not officially met yet to discuss or vote on it, so they had not heard back from the neighborhood.

f. Status of landscaping for the James Lewis Apartments:

Mr. Kronsberg said they had added this to their list to do a landscape plan for the James Lewis Apartments.

g. Status of landscaping along Cleveland Street:

h. Request for the power washing of cinder block walls surrounding College Park on Grove Street and Rutledge Avenue:

Mr. Kronsberg said he and Ms. Copeland had spoken about Cleveland Street and it was The Citadel's frontage of the baseball stadium. It went along with item h., which was the same property, but their wall. Mayor Cogswell said he thought Councilmember Gregorie's request was a good one. They had made an inquiry to get in with The Citadel to discuss it as it was their property, but he wasn't sure if that meeting had been scheduled or not. Chairwoman Parker said she was sure there were cadets that would be happy to help with it.

i. Discussion regarding Martin Park and the ground in front of the James Lewis complex:

Mr. Kronsberg thought the James Lewis complex was the same as the landscaping status and the Martin Park project was on the TIF list for a park renovation and park house expansion.

New Business:

a. Capital Projects updates:

b. Maintenance updates:

See attached Exhibit A.

Mayor Cogswell said he had sent an e-mail that day when he had gotten an initial schematic of proposed site plans for both W.L. Stephens and Johns Island, and he wanted to land on that quickly. Mr. Kronsberg said they had box and bubble diagrams they were working through, like the full wishlist programming from the Recreation Department, to see how those test fits worked. They would have something soon to review. Mayor Cogswell asked Ms. Copeland if she had any contact with the neighboring property owner on Johns Island in setting up a meeting there. She said she had reached out to Dr. Ross's office, but she hadn't heard back since they canceled the first meeting. She would try again. Mayor Cogswell said they may send them certified mail as

they seemed to be avoiding them. Ms. Copeland said she would take one more pass, but she didn't disagree.

Chairwoman Parker asked when the roof replacement had been done at Bees Ferry Recreation Center. Mr. Kronsberg said it was probably 2010 or 2011. It was a little bit before his time. He thought there was roof leaking. There was a shingle roof on that part of the building. Chairwoman Parker asked if the City had to pay that in full or was anything warrantied by the contractor. He said it would have been outside of any warranty period.

Councilmember Waring asked if the TRC review for the West Ashley Bikeway would be the last time through. Mr. Kronsberg said that was the goal. Councilmember Waring said he knew they had changed the path when they bought the Money Man Pawn Shop and tore it down. He asked if they had given up on the landscaping that had the Bikeway continuing straight to Wappo Road. Mr. Kronsberg said it was a County project for the intersection work, but they had talked about creating a Gateway to the Bikeway before the Limehouse parcel came into play. Their ownership took that over and then they would get a new alignment of the Bikeway along Hwy. 17 to the intersection. It was a little bit out of play now. Councilmember Waring asked what the next step was after TRC review. Mr. Kronsberg said they would get a permit and then go out to bid.

Chairwoman Parker asked if they still had one or two staff members that lined all the fields Citywide. Mr. Kronsberg said it was two. They supplemented with temp labor, but the two guys were in charge. Chairwoman Parker said the fields looked great. She would see them with the robot, and it was a lot of ground to cover. Mr. Kronsberg said the robots helped tremendously. They would get their GPS coordinates uploaded to the satellite and then the robot did all the work, which was amazing to watch.

c. Recreation spring and summer programming updates:

Ms. Yarbrough said that Saturday was the first day of spring sports. They had almost 5,500 kids playing spring youth sports throughout the City. They were on the soccer, baseball, softball fields, and running track, and that didn't include the 1,500 kids playing elementary and middle school tennis. They were three and a half weeks into their season, so they had a lot of sports going on. Additionally, they had just finished registration for the James Island Swim Team which was a summer swim team with 150 kids signed up. That was outside of the 330 that were already swimming year-round with the SMART Team. They had started working on pools, getting them cleaned up and ready to re-open as the days got warmer. Currently, the only pool they had was MLK, so it would be nice to get some other pools open as they got closer to May. They were still taking registration for a few summer camps, specialty camps, sports camps, where they had some openings. Swim lessons registration would be held in May. They had gotten funding, thanks to Council this year, to re-engage Reading Partners with the summer programs at Arthur Christopher Community Center and St. Julian Devine Community Center. That group would come in and work with the school age children during the summer months to stop, halt, or slow down the summer slide of kids not reading and not being engaged in the hope that they were ready to go back to school in August. They were finishing their adult USTA Program, and they were taking registration for the upcoming season, which was mixed doubles. That was what they were doing across the City. They were piling people on top of all the fields Mr. Kronsberg was doing. They needed rain, but they wanted to keep playing, so they were hoping they would get rain at times they needed it and then dry when they needed it to be dry. The Cooper River Bridge Run was coming up. The City had been working on that, both the Parks Department and Recreation, along with Paul Wieters. On March 31st, Tennis in the City would be at 4:00 p.m. at Jack Adams Tennis Center and they would love for anyone to come. They were bringing their after-school programs from

Wings, Arthur Christopher, Shaw Center, and St. Julian Devine. The kids would get to be on the court with pros and tennis instructors. They had also gotten free tickets from Coco to pass out. She hoped to see them all out on the field or some activity or event sometime soon.

Chairwoman Parker said in the past they couldn't offer swim lessons because of the lifeguard shortage, but it sounded like they had a great concept moving forward. Ms. Yarbrough gave Stephen Fernandez, the Aquatics Manager, a lot of credit as he was good at hiring young folks. He was able to work well with 16-, 17-, and 18-year-olds. He did the certification for them. The City offered a certification, at no cost, if they were going to work for the City. They weren't training everybody else's lifeguards throughout the Lowcountry, but they were training folks that wanted to be a City of Charleston lifeguard. She had a meeting with Mr. Fernandez the prior week and he reported that the recruitment process had gone well. They wanted to thank HR as they were interviewing, hiring, and certifying, so they were going to be ready to go. The problem they had had nationwide with lifeguards and swim instruction was, hopefully, changing according to where they were today. Chairwoman Parker said that was great and thanked Ms. Yarbrough as it was important in the Lowcountry.

Mayor Cogswell told Ms. Yarbrough he wanted to put on her agenda, particularly with the Aquatics Team, to have internal staff and the larger swim community weigh in on the schematic designs for W.L. Stephens and Johns Island. He wanted to make sure that they had input. He had been approached by a couple different folks, who he thought she knew, and he thought the design and programming would be better if they made sure those folks were engaged. He wanted to put that out there and would get with her on how best and when to do that. Ms. Yarbrough thanked Mayor Cogswell and said she appreciated that. She knew those folks would be glad to hear it. Every month when she went to the board meeting for the SMART parents, they asked where they were on those two pools. She knew they were all anxious to give input.

d. Thomas Johnson Park requests/discussion:

Chairwoman Parker said this was a small community park, but it had evolved into a great, large pickleball community. Hundreds of people were there a day, ages 5 to 90, playing pickleball together. People were coming from all around the area because they had heard it was a great community of pickleball players. She was glad everyone was utilizing the park. She said they did have a couple small requests. She asked if they could move one or two of the picnic tables over to the pickleball courts. When it rained, there was standing water. It was nicely shaded by the oaks, but they ended up with standing water, so they requested a pickleball squeegee for the court. It had been previously requested that the dominant pickleball lines be painted and there were cracks on the court. She had noticed in Mr. Kronsberg's maintenance sheet that it was on the list to be replaced. She thought that one had been resurfaced recently, so she didn't know if that was something easy where they could call the contractor to come out. She said the community would appreciate any help. Mr. Kronsberg said he got it.

e. Johns Island Recreation Center discussion (Requested by Councilmember McBride):

f. Discussion re: W.L. Stephens Aquatic Center timeline (Requested by Councilmember McBride):

Councilmember McBride said he wanted to be aggressive at putting information out to the public on the timeline of the development of the Johns Island Recreation Center and W.L. Stephens Aquatic Center, especially the public input portion. He wanted to personally be able to know as

much in advance as possible. Being relatively new he wanted to see how the process worked, how the City took in public input, and he wanted to amplify it as much as he could by making sure as much of the public was aware. Generally, speaking, on all projects at all levels of government, City, County, SCDOT, a common complaint he got, and they all probably got, was that there was the official notification for public input but 90% of the people didn't hear about it and it went forward. Then, they were like, 'Who decided this? I was never able to give my input.' So, he wanted to try and do whatever he could to minimize that as much as possible by being proactive and amplifying whatever the City did formally. Mr. Kronsberg said with a lot of the roadway projects he did hear that, and had probably experienced that, as well. They would conduct a robust stakeholder community engagement process with him, the Mayor's Office, and anybody else that wanted to join in. They would advertise that through their Communications Office. It had been a little while since they had done one of those, but they would be engaging the public, stakeholders, and constituency. Councilmember McBride asked if there was a general estimated month that was coming up for the first formal public input. Mr. Kronsberg said he didn't have that. They had provided a contract to the design team, they were marking it up, and hopefully, they would get that on the Council agenda. Once they got the contract finished, it would have all the dates identified in it and they would be able to start publicizing what the process looked like.

Councilmember Waring thought the City had bought the land behind the old Hardee's with Greenbelt funds to try to create soccer fields. Mr. Kronsberg said the Woodland Road property was bought with Greenbelt funds. Councilmember Shealy said that was right. Councilmember Waring asked if there were any plans on that. Mr. Kronsberg said there wasn't anything currently on the books for that property. A lot of times their Greenbelt projects were land banked, but they could re-evaluate it, and look at it with the Mayor and his office. Councilmember Waring asked if it was a similar situation where they bought ten acres with a lake on River Road or somewhere with Greenbelt funds. Mr. Kronsberg said it was about 25 acres on Maybank Hwy. and most of it was wetlands. The highland was minimal. It was another Greenbelt purchase and there were no current plans on it. They would like to engage with the hospital project, once they started moving forward, to see how they could team up on something there. Councilmember Shealy said they also had the Bear Swamp Road property that was sitting, and it was a gorgeous piece of property. Long Savannah was starting, so there would only be 5,000 new homes out there. Councilmember Waring asked how many acres. Mr. Kronsberg said the Bear Swamp Road property was 200 acres. There was a delineation done a few years back and he thought it was up to 80 acres of wetlands.

g. Update on Parks and Recreation Master Plan General Obligation Bonds:

Ms. Wharton said first reading for an ordinance for the GO Bond for the Parks and Recreation Master Plan was on the next night's Council meeting agenda. The three projects were Johns Island Park, W.L. Stephens, and Stephen Washington Park on James Island. They had rating calls that day and would get their ratings the following Friday, but it was on the Council agenda the following night for first reading. There was also a Part b. for the Fire Training Facility and the remainder of the Municipal Operations Center, as well. Chairwoman Parker asked Ms. Wharton if she could share a copy of the ordinance. Chairwoman Parker said if she read it correctly, they were taking a first draw of \$40 million. Ms. Wharton said that was right. The referendum was for \$70 million, and the first borrowing was for \$40 million. They would have to borrow all the remainder within five years with a plan to do a second borrowing, which was what they had talked about the whole time. Chairwoman Parker asked if the \$40 million was being utilized for those three items. Ms. Wharton said there was also a little bit, depending on what the projects came in as, that Mr. Kronsberg was working on for estimates of unallocated for some smaller projects. Chairwoman Parker asked if they were using the bond money for those smaller projects. Ms.

Wharton said it was \$40 million in total. Depending on what the three larger projects came in at there would be some unallocated portion to use towards other smaller projects.

Chairwoman Parker said she wanted to end on a high note, but the bond referendum discussions started back in 2022. It was tough to get it over the finish line. They made it just in time. It came to fruition, they got it on the ballot, and it passed with 80% approval. After years of requesting that they implement a strategy or next steps regarding the prioritization of some of the items listed, she felt like they fell short on it. They were great projects, but it seemed like they were eating up half of the bond for those two big projects. She would have liked to see a little more prioritization or touched on a lot of the items that were put in the referendum, so that they could show that to their constituents. She asked if \$20 million going here and \$20 million going there. Mayor Cogswell said they didn't know yet until they got a design, but they were through the RFQ process. Based on what the original breakdown solicitation that went out to the voters, they knew what the estimates were for W.L. Stephens and for Johns Island. Stephen Washington wasn't part of it. It was now, but there was an allocation in there for additional work to parks as a catchall. Those two were the ones that were most ready to go, so they were trying to expedite, and if they could get the details on the balance sooner rather than later, he was all for moving forward on them in short order. Chairwoman Parker said she understood. She just thought that they, as a Council, knew there was a need, and they may have to find other funding if those numbers didn't cover what they planned to do on Johns Island and W.L. Stephens. There was a large chunk of the referendum that they weren't going to be able to touch on some of the other items that they had hoped to touch on. She hoped that moving forward they could put some type of plan together, a consensus, as they had asked for it for a while. They hadn't really gotten any direction and then now they were opening that spigot for \$40 million on those two much-needed projects. Mayor Cogswell said for clarity it was three projects and it was plus more. Chairwoman Parker said that was what she was wondering as she didn't think Stephen Washington was part of the referendum, so that was the catchall. In talks when they initially did that referendum, that was what they were afraid of that they were going to hyper focus and put those items on the list representing that to the voters and then use the money for deferred maintenance, which was what they were doing at Stephen Washington. While that was in her district and she was grateful, it wasn't on the list. She knew that the Committee had talked about putting a prioritization list together and it sounded like they were just focusing on those two projects. Again, that was great, but she hoped that the next round of funds they could discuss spreading it a little like they had said Bears Bluff having some conceptual designs, Dills Tract having some conceptual ideas, rough ideas. Mayor Cogswell said that was the plan. Chairwoman Parker thought that was the plan initially, but they were jumping right in to get those done, which she guessed was good. Also, this item was coming to Recreation that day, but it was on the Council agenda for next night's meeting. She thought the whole reason they changed all the dates was so items could come and sit in Committee and then come, but this was bam-bam. Mayor Cogswell asked Ms. Wharton if they wanted to defer it off Council for two weeks. Ms. Wharton said she would prefer not to.

Ms. Wharton said that Stephen Washington Park was in the Parks and Recreation Master Plan. Chairwoman Parker said she knew that, but the way the referendum was written was open-ended. She thought those on Council understood that, but the referendum to the voters, those were the priority items listed and then some of that catchall deferred maintenance they were hoping wouldn't be utilized for that. Councilmember McBride agreed that if the referendum listed certain projects and the people voted for that, they had to be prudent to ensure that they were following through with what the referendum said even if in the weeds there were a lot of flexibility written into where the money goes. Chairwoman Parker said they had been working on it for many years. It was great that it was coming to fruition as there were some great complexes, but half of the bond was going towards much-needed projects, but the City, as a whole, \$70 million was a BB in

a bucket, and they were going to be spread thin. In the second phase, she hoped they could do initially what they thought they would do which was to have a plan for those dollars moving forward.

h. Hybrid Recreation Committee meetings to begin in April:

Chairwoman Parker they had talked last time about changing the meeting from virtual to hybrid, so it would be in the Council Chamber. Ms. Cook said it would be the third Thursday of the month before Community Development at 2:00 p.m. Chairwoman Parker said if they were available to join, Community Development would follow right after. Ms. Cook said the next meeting would be April 17th at 2:00 p.m. and Mr. Clapper would be sending out the updated calendar invites. Chairwoman Parker said she would love for everyone to be there in person. She enjoyed in-person rather than online, but it would be hybrid for those that couldn't attend.

With there being no other business, the meeting adjourned at 4:55 p.m.

Submitted by Wanda Stepp
Clerk of Council's Office