

**SOUTH BEND BOARD OF PARK COMMISSIONERS**  
**REGULAR MEETING**  
June 22, 2021

The Board of Park Commissioners of the City of South Bend, Indiana met on Monday, June 22, 2021, via Microsoft Teams virtual meeting for its regular meeting. Notice of the date, time and place of the meeting were duly given as required by law. The public was provided with a link to join the virtual meeting.

Park Board members present were as follows:

Mr. Mark Neal, President  
Mr. Dan Farrell  
Ms. Consuella Hopkins

Park Board members absent were as follows:

Ms. Aimee Buccellato

VPA staff members present: Aaron Perri, Executive Director; Eva Ennis, Operations Coordinator; Jonathan Jones, Director of Recreational Experiences; Bridget Fields, Special Events Manager; Annie Smith, Chief Development Officer

Other city representatives present: Clara McDaniels, Assistant City Attorney; Lori Hamman, Councilperson

I. Call to Order

Mark Neal called the meeting to order at 5:00 pm.

II. Minutes of the Regular Board Meeting on May 17, 2021

Motion to approve the meeting minutes of May 17, 2021, by Dan Farrell, supported by Consuella Hopkins, motion carried. Roll call vote 3-0.

III. Consent Agenda

Motion to approve the consent agenda of May 17, 2021, by Dan Farrell, supported by Consuella Hopkins motion carried. Roll call vote 3-0.

IV. Partner of the Month

Aaron Perri explained that “Partner of the Month” will be a new administrative agenda item on the Park Board monthly agenda to highlight the diverse partner groups VPA works with. This month VPA is featuring South Bend Community School Corporation / Chartwells, which offers free summer meals program at a dozen different parks with 1,000s of meals given out to children throughout the city. This summer Chartwells will also be hosting a culinary kitchen in the parks where there will be live cooking demonstrations.

Kareemah Fowler and Tanara Winters represented South Bend Community School Corporation/Chartwells. Tanara Winters explained Discovery Kitchen starts on Friday at Harrison Playground. There will be live cooking demos every Friday throughout the summer at different park locations.

Mark Neal also thanked the South Bend Community School Corporation for their partnership and creativity in providing quality programs and meals at the parks.

#### V. Interviewing of Interested Residents

Mark Neal opened the floor for interested residents to speak on a topic not on the agenda. There were no comments.

#### VI. Reports by Organizations – Potawatomi Zoo

Josh Sisk, Director of Potawatomi Zoo, provided an update on this year's record-breaking attendance and membership numbers - 10,000 membership households and 107,000 visitors already this year. The gift shop has already exceeded the anticipated revenues for the year. The zoo also hired a new retail manager to help with increased retail traffic. The zoo has raised \$4.6 million for the giraffe exhibit. Construction work is moving along and on schedule to get giraffes in by the end of September. He also noted that work on the lion exhibit has not started yet, and funds for that project will come partially from the hotel motel tax increase. Planning for a parking lot expansion project is underway. The zoo is looking to add 53 spots to the current parking lot.

Josh Sisk also reviewed a piece of park property between the parking lot expansion area and the current zoo boundaries as a potential option for expanding the tiger exhibit. The priority of the zoo would be to preserve the oak trees already in that area.

Mark Neal asked what type of agreement would be required to make this sort of change and asked if it could be reviewed at the July board meeting. Aaron Perri noted that this proposal to expand the zoo's footprint would require a minor change to the management agreement to extend the current zoo property boundaries.

Dan Farrell asked what the current usage of the parcel looks like and whether there are a lot of park users that go there. Josh Sisk replied that the space is not utilized by the public much, and he anticipates it being used even less once the parking lot expands and cuts this parcel off from the rest of the park.

#### VII. New Business

##### 1. Announcement of Seeking Federal Grant Funds for West Bank Trail Project

Matthew Moyers, Community & Standards Coordinator for VPA, explained that one of the requirements for applying for federal grants is to have a public announcement that we are seeking funds. VPA is applying for grant dollars through Land Water Conservation Fund for a \$500,000 matching grant. VPA will learn more about the submission process in upcoming months but the plan is to write the grant for West Bank Trail.

Mark Neal asked if the funds can only be used for capital and how the funds are distributed through the grant cycle.

Matthew Moyers replied that the funds can be used for design work but not for programming. The funds will reimburse the recipient for project expenses over a three-year period.

#### VIII. Report by Project Manager of Facilities & Ground Patrick Sherman

Patrick Sherman provided the following updates:

- Facilities & Grounds has had difficulties with hiring and is currently operating 80% on central mowing and 50% on horticulture program. To help with shortages, VPA has hired MWBE (Minority- and Women-owned Business Enterprises) to fill the gaps.
- Randy Nowacki is retiring from Facilities and Grounds after 39 years.
- VPA is working with IT and Police on a security camera pilot project at several parks.
- There is a new playground at Muessel Grove Park that was funded through dollars from Department of Community Investment. Once the Coal Line Trail is complete, it will connect to Muessel Grove Park.
- MLK, Jr. Center will see upgrades this year including extra lighting around the building, a new monument sign, and pole banner signs.
- Born Learning Trails, a partnership with United Way which provides educational signage at parks director to children under 5, were installed at Southeast Park.
- Facilities & Grounds staff is installing new fencing at Studebaker Golf Course.
- VPA is now cleaning our restrooms twice a day because restroom cleanliness is consistently one of the most common complaints.
- Pier Park infinity mirror art project was delayed, but it is expected to be complete in a few weeks.
- Seitz Park project is moving along on the northern Riverwalk section.
- There is a slight delay with the AEP transmission line installation happening near the East Bank Trail.
- Construction at the O'Brien Center is nearing completion.

#### IX. Report by Executive Director Aaron Perri

Aaron Perri gave the following updates:

- Due to the recent storm, nearly 100 issues of storm damage were reported including 30 blocked streets. VPA's Forestry Team and the City's Street Department worked together to clear all the streets by the end of the day.
- This weekend there are Juneteenth celebrations at LaSalle Park and Howard Park and the Leeper Park Art Fair.
- Howard Park hosted IEDC and South Bend Elkhart Regional group for an event to launch the READI program, which provides funding for quality of place projects.
- South Bend Common Council passed a restated local resolution to reinstate the Professional Sports Development and Convention Area. Senate Bill 348 passed at the State of Indiana will allow South Bend to capture local sales and income tax to primarily be used for Four Winds Field or Century Center.
- YMCA is conducting an aquatics community needs assessment to evaluate the need for aquatics facility in the area after the closure of their Northside Blvd location which included a pool.
- Work for the 2022 budget season has started. As related to VPA, we do not expect to see many changes operationally. This is also a Teamster negotiation year.
- VPA received Merit Award for Howard Park at the International Making Cities Livable conference.

No other questions or comments from the Park Commissioners, meeting adjourned at 6:03 pm by President Mark Neal.

The next regular meeting will be held Monday, July 19, 2021, at 5:00 p.m. at Howard Park Event Center and virtually.

Respectfully Submitted,

Eva Ennis