PARKS, RECREATION, AND COMMUNITY ENHANCEMENT COMMITTEE

The Parks, Recreation, and Community Enhancement Committee Meeting was held on January 12, 2015, at 3:30 p.m. with Chairman Dixon presiding. Members present were Mr. Hutchison, Mr. Anderson, Mr. Caldwell, and Mrs. Horsey.

AGENDA ADDITIONS/DELETIONS

Mr. Anderson moved for approval of the agenda, seconded by Mr. Hutchison and unanimously carried.

Mallard Pond Park Concept Plan

Mrs. Ann Marie Townshend, Director of Planning and Community Development, advised members that Mallard Pond Park is a six (6) acre, undeveloped park surrounded by Mallard Pond Development, Brandywine Court Condominiums, Fox Hall West Addition, and Heatherfield East. Mrs. Townshend stated that staff identified Mallard Pond Park as a location for new playground equipment for FY 2015 and funds were budgeted for this purpose. She explained that the City's bicycle and pedestrian plans, which are currently under development by the Dover/Kent County Metropolitan Planning Organization (MPO), identify pathway connections through Mallard Pond Park which would connect Fox Hall West Addition and Mallard Pond to Marsh Creek Lane and ultimately Route 8. Mrs. Townshend indicated that this would become a significant pathway connection, as it would provide a safe bicycle and pedestrian route from these neighborhoods to the new Dover High School.

Mrs. Townshend advised members that the Parks and Recreation Department hosted a community meeting at Mallard Pond Park on July 29, 2014 and invited property owners of the surrounding neighborhoods. She explained that, with the feedback received at this community meeting, the pathway and playground were better placed on the property to avoid potential conflicts with the neighbors. Mrs. Townshend stated that residents of Brandywine Court Condominiums indicated that people park in the private parking areas on Par Haven Drive to utilize the park and residents were concerned that parking conflicts would increase with increased activity at the park. Based on this feedback, Mrs. Townshend noted that the concept plan that was developed shows a small parking area off Marsh Creek Lane.

Mrs. Townshend advised members that the concept plan would phase the improvements based on availability of funds. She said the first phase, and likely the only phase within the current fiscal year, would be the construction of a playground. The second phase would be the construction of the pathway between Mallard Pond and Marsh Creek Lane. Mrs. Townshend explained that staff would work with the Delaware Department of Transportation (DelDOT) and the Dover/Kent County MPO to seek funding for the pathway. The pathway segment which will connect to Fox Hall West Addition would be a future phase, as concurrence from the Fox Hall West Addition and a stream crossing would be required to complete this. Mrs. Townshend indicated that the parking area would be a phase in a future Capital Improvement Program (CIP) for the park.

Mrs. Townshend stated that if the concept plan were approved, the playground contract would be presented to City Council for approval in accordance with the purchasing policy. She explained that the FY 2015 CIP anticipates $33,000 in grant funding to support the playground installation and staff was in the process of applying for these funds.

Staff recommended approval of the improvements identified on the concept plan, noting that all improvements beyond the installation of playground equipment would be subject to funding availability and approval of associated expenditures by City Council.

Responding to Mr. Hutchison, Mrs. Townshend indicated that the size of the property is approximately six (6) acres and, while she was unsure of the number of youth in the target area, she explained that four (4) or five (5) families with children attended the workshop, as well as a family from Westfield. Mrs. Townshend stated that the majority of the people with children came from Mallard Pond.

In response to Mr. Dixon's inquiry regarding the needs of this park versus those of other parks in the City, Mrs. Townshend explained that the City's Recreational Needs Assessment was a separate project. She informed members that money was allocated in the Capital Plan for playground improvements at this particular park; however, the idea was to look at playgrounds, as well as other features, so that a comprehensive improvement could be accomplished instead of piece by piece.

Responding to Mr. Caldwell regarding the parking concerns that were raised by residents, Mrs. Townshend stated that the concern would be primarily resolved by adding a small parking area off Marsh Creek Lane, noting that the bulk of those utilizing the park would be people who walk there from adjacent neighborhoods.

Mr. Hutchison moved to recommend approval of the improvements identified on the concept plan, noting that all improvements beyond the installation of playground equipment would be subject to funding availability and approval of associated expenditures by City Council. The motion was seconded by Mr. Anderson and unanimously carried.

Update on Recreation Needs Assessment - Presentation and Discussion of Survey Data

Mrs. Ann Marie Townshend, Director of Planning and Community Development, reviewed the Recreation Needs Assessment Update - Survey Highlights.

Mrs. Townshend advised members that the Recreation Needs Assessment yielded responses from 506 people, most of whom responded online. She explained that, based on the data received, 52% of respondents indicated they were City residents who noted the neighborhoods they lived in to avoid the misunderstanding of those who think they live inside City limits but actually do not. Of the remaining respondents, 28% were non-city residents and 20% did not disclose their residency.

Mrs. Townshend reviewed those priorities that were ranked the highest, reflecting that 25% or more of the respondents wanted to see these improvements. She noted that although an indoor recreational facility for Dover Park achieved the interest of slightly more than 25% of respondents, indoor restroom facilities and benches at Dover Park and Silver Lake Park ranked higher. Overall, she stated that people supported the idea that the parks and the programs offered by the City should be funded by a mix of fees, grants, and taxes, noting specifically that 74% believed that program fees were the way to fund the programs. Mrs. Townshend said that the comments on the survey indicated people thought there should be more fundraising and business sponsorships, noting that, currently, the only program that seeks business sponsorship is Concerts on the Green.

Mrs. Townshend pointed out that there was significant support for residents to pay a lower fee than non-residents. She noted that 67% of those who responded to that particular question believed that City residents should pay a lower fee. Mrs. Townshend stated that this provision was not currently in place and that this was something to consider in the future as recommendations are developed from the needs assessment. She advised members that the comment portion of the survey suggested that the City could do a better job informing the public about programs provided and, in response, the City will continue to distribute flyers in schools, provide Public Service Announcements (PSA's) and, based on recommendations made in the comment section, could consider doing more paid advertisements. Mrs. Townshend indicated that this would require increasing revenue through sponsorships and business contributions.

Mrs. Townshend stated that another suggestion submitted through the comments section of the survey was for a pickleball field, noting that, although the numbers were not overwhelming in favor of this, the comment field reflected strong interest to include permanent markings, particularly from the senior citizen community. She noted she was not very familiar with pickleball but believes it is similar to tennis and very popular right now, especially among seniors. In addition to pickleball, another topic in the comments section was a dog park, which would not be particularly desirable from the City's perspective for several reasons, including the time and cost necessary to maintain the turf. However, she noted that there was a very vocal part of the population that would like to have a place to take their dogs to run and socialize with other dogs and this was something to consider.

Summarizing, Mrs. Townshend explained that this information was drawn from the preliminary data. Upon a more thorough review, it was her hope to produce more concrete recommendations within the next month.

Responding to Mr. Anderson regarding indoor bathrooms, Mrs. Townshend explained that Silver Lake is probably the most costly location because the City does not have water run there. She suggested that this may be a two (2) year Capital Improvement Project (CIP), which would allow project design work in the first year with implementation the next year. Mrs. Townshend said the City would seek grant funding under the Delaware Land and Water Trust Fund, which could reimburse up to 50% of the cost. She also stated that, based on the responses received, a skate park would be best located at Schutte Park or Dover Park and a splash pad seemed to be best suited for Silver Lake or Dover Parks.

In response to Mr. Anderson's concerns regarding the lack of skateboarding opportunities, Mrs. Townshend advised members that the information received is still preliminary. She recommended, as the Capital Plan is developed, that a skate park be considered in the next couple of years at Dover Park, ensuring that the best location is selected. Mrs. Townshend suggested planning funding next year for a skate park and restrooms so that things are not put in places that preclude other uses in the future, such as a building. She also noted the importance in the Dover Park planning process to address concerns regarding landscaping that can be maintained in a way that is natural but not too concealing. Mrs. Townshend indicated that this had been a big

challenge at Dover Park, noting that people do not feel safe because it is so heavily vegetated. Mrs. Townshend stated that money had already been set aside for Dover Park and expressed her opinion that lighting and safety were important components of the planning process.

Mr. Hutchison suggested obtaining not only a comprehensive survey of what the City is doing but also reaching out to Kent County, the YMCA, the Boys and Girls Club, schools, etc., to get a total overview of the recreational needs. Responding, Mrs. Townshend advised that the Parks and Recreation Department had regularly scheduled meetings with the YMCA, Senior Olympics, Special Olympics, Delaware State University, and the Capital School District. Although churches had not been as involved as she would like, Mrs. Townshend shared that she had recently had discussions with Mr. Dixon and Mr. Anderson regarding the new outreach center being built at the Solid Rock Baptist Church and the consensus was that the center would provide a great opportunity for partnerships and programming at that location. After reaching out to Pastor William Grimes, Mrs. Townshend advised members that the hope was to set up a meeting and talk about the type of programming the City could provide such as yoga, Zumba for seniors (Zumba Gold), babysitting training, first aid training, etc., after ensuring the programs meet the church's objectives.

Mr. Dixon expressed his continued concern for the children on the east side of town, referencing Dover Park and the youth in the community. Mrs. Townshend indicated that Dover Park is a priority that will be addressed with the first detailed park plan for immediate improvements, such as a skate park, indoor restrooms, and plans to reserve space for a potential building, if it is determined that it is needed. She stated that the intent was to "beef up" capital planning in that area in the upcoming year.

Responding to Mr. Anderson, Mrs. Townshend stated that she was not aware of any major donations.

In response to Mrs. Horsey, Mrs. Townshend indicated that heating would be necessary in any indoor bathrooms to protect the pipes.

Mr. Dixon suggested reviewing other parks outside of Delaware to see what kind of bathrooms they have and what would work best for parks in the City of Dover.

Mr. Hutchison moved for adjournment, seconded by Mrs. Horsey and unanimously carried.

Meeting adjourned at 4:00 p.m.

Wallace R. Dixon
Chairman

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