PARKS, RECREATION, AND COMMUNITY ENHANCEMENT COMMITTEE

The Parks, Recreation, and Community Enhancement Committee meeting was held on January 11, 2016, at 3:30 p.m. with Chairman Anderson presiding. Members present were Mr. Hosfelt, Mr. Caldwell, and Mrs. Horsey (arrived at 3:35 p.m.). Mr. Lewis was absent. Members of Council present were Mr. Cole (arrived at 3:35 p.m.) and Mr. Hutchison. Mayor Christiansen was also present (departed at 3:34 p.m.).

AGENDA ADDITIONS/DELETIONS

By unanimous consent, the agenda was amended to consider Item #2, Proposed Recreation Center - Dover Park, prior to Item #1, Availability of Soccer Fields.

Proposed Recreation Center - Dover Park

Mayor Christiansen advised members that, for the last year or so, constituents and some civic associations on the east side of the City had expressed the need for a recreation facility since the facility at Dover Park had been torn down. He stated that, with the renewed emphasis on community policing and outreach by the Dover Police Department and the suggestion of possible funding for the construction of such a facility by Attorney General Matt Denn, he felt the time was right to consider looking at constructing a facility at Dover Park similar to the current facility at Schutte Park. Mayor Christiansen expressed his view that such a facility would offer a venue to begin renewing the Police Athletic League (PAL) program that had been very successful in the Dover community. In addition, he suggested that the Martin Luther King Jr. Educational Community Center, headed by Dr. Gus Walker, could also be located at this facility, which would allow this organization to fulfill its mission of mentoring and tutoring at-risk students and youth. Mayor Christiansen felt that the facility could also be a home for another successful program that had been fostered by former Mayor, Council President, and Councilwoman Beverly Williams.

Mayor Christiansen requested that members recommend to Council that monies currently set aside for a possible splash park at Dover Park be expended for the construction of a new multi-purpose, year-round recreation center at this location, noting that a splash park would be used for only a few months during the year. He advised members that he intended to make an application to Attorney General Denn for at least $1M from bank settlement funds that the Attorney General had available and would like the Committee's blessing.

Mrs. Beverly Williams, former City Councilwoman and current Executive Director of Aid in Dover, Inc., 20 Gleneagles Court, introduced her colleague, Mr. Mark Harmon, 731 West Division Street. She informed members that in late 2013, the Criminal Justice Council (CJC) awarded Aid in Dover, Inc. a one (1) year Title 5 grant, which led Aid in Dover, Inc. to ask their federally funded program to allow them to continue their Hot Shots basketball program, which served 450 kids, the majority of whom were boys, and brought 570 referrals. Mrs. Williams explained that they partnered with local leagues, churches, schools, and volunteers. She stated that Mr. Harmon started each session with a presentation to the kids about a life skill, such as appropriate behaviors and reactions to conflict, competition, failure, or success, which was followed by basketball drills conducted by volunteer coaches that reinforced the presentation. Kids then went into open competition. Mrs. Williams indicated that this was the most successful program ever run by Aid in

Dover, Inc. She stated that she attempted to sustain the program, went into partnership with the City of Dover and rented the Schutte Park gym, and funding was found through the MetLife Foundation. Mrs. Williams advised that the MetLife Foundation requires enormous collaborations with partnerships, so she went to the Mayor and Chief of Police to garnish their application with City of Dover and Police Department involvement. She indicated that she had already talked to Mr. Christian Kervick, Director, CJC, about the institution of a PAL program. Mrs. Williams stated that their program was very successful and brought out kids, parents, and guardians, noting that many of these parents were single moms and some were single dads. She indicated that Aid in Dover, Inc. learned that the old programs they were used to running were not what kids wanted, and the blend of skills and recreation proved to be very successful.

Noting that a lot of kids in the area had gotten involved in violence, Mr. Harmon stated that the Aid in Dover, Inc. program included kids from different gangs, and there was no trouble since they were able to diffuse things very quickly and these kids were able to play together. There was less violence and participation in negative activities among 12-to-18-year-olds than had been seen in the past. Mr. Harmon indicated that the youth responded very well and he felt it would be great to continue to provide a place where they can remain safe in an instructive environment.

Mrs. Williams explained that the CJC requires providers to demonstrate impact and meet performance objectives. She noted that through the course of this program 94% of the children had increased knowledge of teamwork, cooperation, collaboration and confidence, and appropriate responses to anger, frustration, disappointment and success.

Mr. Anderson stated his belief that a PAL facility was needed, noting that he was never happy about the neglect of the building at Dover Park but felt that maybe something better could come out of it. He questioned how much funding had been set aside for a recreation building at Dover Park. Responding, Mrs. Ann Marie Townshend, Director of Planning and Community Development, indicated that the funding set aside was not specific to a building but was for something at Dover Park. The intent was to start with a park master plan to lay out all of the improvements that came from the City's Recreation Needs Assessment. Mrs. Townshend stated that $180,000 was designated for the Dover Park but was unable to recall the amount for the splash pad.

Mr. Anderson stated his recollection that the total funding was approximately $300,000.

Mrs. Townshend advised members that Mrs. Donna Mitchell, Controller/Treasurer, had made her aware in the past that the capital plan exceeds what is available in the Parkland Reserve Fund, so while things may be in the capital plan, it would not necessarily mean that the money was there and available.

Mr. Anderson indicated that, even with the grant, less than $1.5M would be available and questioned what type of footprint was being discussed for the facility. Responding, Mrs. Williams indicated that her only knowledge was the Mayor's comment about the funding from the Attorney General. The funds she had mentioned from MetLife were operational money and not for construction.

Mr. Anderson noted that once a building was obtained, operation would be one (1) of the big costs.

Mrs. Williams stated that she was looking at MetLife funds because she felt that the last thing the City needed was another expenditure. She stated the need to get this underwritten through corporate or donor funds.

Responding to Mr. Anderson regarding the footprint that was being discussed, Mrs. Williams stated her thought that it would be identical to Schutte Park. She indicated that when Aid in Dover, Inc. ran their program at Schutte Park both gyms were needed due to the heavy response.

Mr. Hutchison asked if staff had been able to assess what the real needs would be if recreation were expanded and if this could be accomplished with the current workforce. Responding, Mrs. Townshend stated that this could definitely not be done with the current force, explaining that when Schutte Park was built, it was staffed with two (2) full-time staff and some part-time staff. She stated that the Parks Department currently had a full-time staff of five (5), noting that there were previously six (6) when the Department was under the direction of Mr. Zach Carter. Mrs. Townshend explained that several staff members perform duties out of the office, for instance, while running an after-school program or managing the sports program. There were challenges when Schutte Park opened in 2008 because there were two (2) staff members based at Schutte Park and three (3) at Dover Park, which led to occasions when there was only (1) person at a facility, creating a safety concern. Staff at Dover Park had kept the door locked at times when one (1) person was there alone. Mrs. Townshend indicated that facilities cannot be staffed with part-time staff or volunteers because there is a safety issue. Although there might be enough people to get the work done, there would not be enough to make sure the facilities are staffed at an appropriate level.

Mr. Hutchison questioned whether staff had a good understanding of what the churches, YMCA, Kent County Levy Court, etc., were providing that would tie into the City's programs. Responding, Mrs. Townshend stated that staff did have a good understanding of the other programs; however, the effect that the Kent County Recreation Center being built would have on indoor space demands was unknown. She noted that this very large facility would open within 12 months and she was unsure how this would play into supply and demand.

Mr. Hosfelt asked if part of the increased manpower approved for the Police Department was to support bringing the PAL initiative back. He inquired if the position in the Police Department would be a full-time position and if this person would be available to help support the building if constructed. Responding, Deputy Police Chief Marvin Mailey stated that the Police Department planned to assign a part-time Special Unit officer to this for 2016, noting that this position was advertised today. He indicated that the long-term plan was to make it a full-time position.

Mrs. Williams advised members that the Hot Shots program was not for those kids who were going to the Boys and Girls Club, the YMCA, or official, established recreation programs. She stated that Aid in Dover, Inc., with forethought and intent, sought kids who were at extreme risk, which was a large number of the kids that were served. These children were not attending regular programs since those programs had fees attached, which these children could not afford.

Mrs. Horsey stated that anything that could be done to get Dover Park up and running again would be a good thing, noting that the new Kent County Recreation Center being constructed on New Burton Road was on the west side of town. She expressed the need to keep a focus on the east side.

Mrs. Williams stated that the programs that were partnering with Kent County were originally for at-risk kids but evolved into something else. She indicated that there was definitely a need for programs for at-risk kids, stating her view that money would be spent either on recreation programs or in law enforcement or jail sentences.

Mr. Anderson stated that the Committee had been holding up on strategic planning while waiting for information on this matter and indicated the need for a decision.

Mr. Hosfelt expressed his feeling that members all liked what they were hearing, but he did not know if there was anything to endorse or move on to Council. He expressed his support for what had been discussed.

Mr. Anderson felt that basic information regarding the footprint options and costs were needed. He stated that a place to start would be to have staff investigate this and bring back a broad cost estimate.

Mr. Hosfelt stated he would be willing to endorse this, but felt that more must be heard from Mayor Christiansen and Attorney General Denn to know if money would be committed.

Mrs. Townshend asked, if this matter were to be referred to staff, that it be clear which staff it is referred to, noting that to date she and the City Manager had not been involved at all. She was unsure whether the Parks Department staff should develop estimates for something when they were not part of the discussion.

Mr. Hosfelt suggested that the matter be referred back to the Mayor for more information, noting that this would give him the opportunity to speak with staff, and when the Mayor had more of a viable plan it could be brought back for consideration.

Mr. Anderson moved to refer this matter to the Mayor and staff to collaborate to form a more concrete proposal with cost estimates by the Committee's March meeting.

In response to Mr. Caldwell, Mr. Anderson clarified that the staff he was referring to was the Parks and Recreation Department and the City Manager's designee.

Mr. Hosfelt stated that he could not second the motion because he felt there was no way to come up with a concept and estimates by March. He indicated that he would like to hear more from the Mayor. Mr. Hosfelt felt that it would be unfair to refer the matter to staff without anything concrete to support the proposal and with staff not having been contacted or involved in the conversations to this point.

Mr. Anderson noted that this was not a hidden issue but had been part of a conversation for four (4) months and had been delayed on the Committee agenda.

Mr. Hosfelt recalled a conversation about a splash pad, indicating that this was the first he had heard of PAL going into a new building at Dover Park. He expressed his opinion that there was a lot more to this than making a motion to put it back on staff at this time.

The motion to refer this matter to the Mayor and staff to collaborate to form a more concrete proposal with cost estimates by the Committee's March meeting failed for lack of a second.

Mr. Hosfelt moved to refer the proposal back to the Mayor for more information, seconded by Mrs. Horsey and carried by a vote of three (3) yes (Hosfelt, Caldwell, and Horsey), one (1) no (Anderson), and one (1) absent (Lewis).

Availability of Soccer Fields

During the Parks, Recreation, and Community Enhancement Committee meeting of December 14, 2015, members considered the availability of soccer fields and deferred this item until the Committee's next meeting, scheduled in January.

Mrs. Ann Marie Townshend, Director of Planning and Community Development, stated that she had sent emails to Delaware Union and had received a response this morning indicating that they wanted to have a follow-up meeting. She advised members that she did inform Delaware Union that this item was on the Committee's agenda for consideration today for an update.

Responding to Mr. Hosfelt, Mrs. Townshend advised members that registration for the City's soccer program would be sent out at the end of January and Delaware Union had advised that they usually begin registration at the beginning of January; however, they indicated during the December 14, 2015 meeting that they would wait on what the City came up with.

Mr. Hosfelt offered to help in any way possible. Mrs. Townshend noted that the last Committee meeting was held on December 14, 2015 and schools were closed for the holidays the following week. She stated that Mr. Dan Simmons, Dover Recreational Vice President, Delaware Union, had indicated that he would be meeting with Mr. Toriano Giddens, Principal, William Henry Middle School, and she suspected that he was not able to do this before the holidays, which might have caused the delay.

Ms. Judy Shade, Membership Director at the Dover YMCA, advised members that the YMCA had collaborated with the City of Dover on other ventures, but this had been their first undertaking to join their fall soccer program with the City of Dover because they were able to use Schutte Park and the City's field. Ms. Shade indicated that it had been an incredible season that allowed Holy Cross School parents and families, Dover YMCA families, and City of Dover residents to come together. There were 87 children from the Dover YMCA who participated, and she estimated that 85% - 90% were City residents. Ms. Shade stated that some participants had not been on Schutte Park fields previously and were thrilled, impressed, and had a great time, and she hoped this collaboration would

continue for the spring. Ms. Shade stated her understanding that many people look at the YMCA as a membership organization; however, she informed members that the YMCA is a not-for-profit organization that offers $300,000 per year in scholarship funds to families in need. She indicated that it was a great partnership and would hate to see it dissolve.

In response to Mr. Hosfelt as to whether a decision was needed today, Mrs. Townshend stated that, absent any motion, staff would move forward, but she was unsure what Delaware Union's plans were. She stated her concern that moving forward without a decision would create more chaos. Mrs. Townshend indicated that this matter could be pushed to next month, keeping in mind that when the Committee makes a recommendation it is not final until the next Council meeting, so this would cause a delay until the end of February for something that typically starts in March. Alternatively, she stated that if it was known that Delaware Union would be there and have an answer, perhaps a special meeting could be added to the January 26, 2016 Council Committee of the Whole agenda.

Mr. Anderson stated that this matter would now come under staff's discretion and that staff had the authority to negotiate and make a decision, and Mrs. Townshend concurred. Mr. Anderson indicated that this item was placed on the agenda because Delaware Union had a concern and wanted the matter discussed and that had been accomplished. He noted that it was rushed because the City was told that a decision must be made by the beginning of January; however, if there was no input from Delaware Union, he suggested that nothing needed to be done, other than to ask staff to do their best.

Mr. Hosfelt stated that he concurred with Mr. Anderson's comments.

Lighting and Security at the Hamlet Park

Mrs. Ann Marie Townshend, Director of Planning and Community Development, advised members that meetings had been held with Mr. Anderson, Mr. Sudler, the Mayor, and residents of the Hamlet, who expressed concern about the shopping center and the increase in criminal activity in their neighborhood, particularly related to Hamlet Park. She stated that she and Lieutenant Christopher Hermance from the Police Department had recently visited the park. Mrs. Townshend indicated that people were using the park for activities that were not desired there and there was discussion about using lighting to discourage poor behavior. She advised members that Hamlet Park fronts on the road but is very deep, and people are doing things that are hidden by the playground, which is toward the front. She noted that lighting the area would make it harder to hide. Mrs. Townshend explained that if lighting were installed, it would be around the playground area, which would be a minor capital project that would have to be included for the next fiscal year.

Citizen Suggestions

Downtown American Flag Project, June Myers

Mr. Anderson stated that Ms. June Myers was very excited about a mission to encourage a more patriotic display downtown and flying more flags on Loockerman Street, particularly during the patriotic holiday season from Memorial Day through Independence Day. Mr. Anderson stated that he was unsure if there were associated regulatory issues.

Mr. Hosfelt moved for adjournment, seconded by Mr. Caldwell and unanimously carried.

Meeting adjourned at 4:11 p.m.

David L. Anderson
Chairman

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