PARKS, RECREATION, AND COMMUNITY ENHANCEMENT COMMITTEE

The Parks, Recreation, and Community Enhancement Committee Meeting was held on July 8, 2013, at 12:03 p.m. with Chairman Dixon presiding. Members present were Mr. Caldwell and Mrs. Horsey. Mr. Perza and Mrs. Williams were absent.

AGENDA ADDITIONS/DELETIONS

Mrs. Horsey moved for approval of the agenda as presented, seconded by Mr. Caldwell and unanimously carried.

Proposed Splash Park

Mrs. Ann Marie Townshend, Director of Planning and Community Development, reminded members that when the North Dover Athletic Pool was removed and swimming became restricted at Silver Lake, the City determined that there was a need to begin planning for water recreation. After conducting research, it was determined that a Splash/Spray Park would be a viable option for providing water-based recreation without the costs and liabilities that would be associated with operating a public pool, explaining that since a Splash/Spray Park would not hold water, it would not require a life guard and would not have the same liability issues as a pool.

Mrs. Townshend stated that once the City made the determination for a Splash/Spray Park, park locations were evaluated. Although there was discussion of locating the Splash Park at Silver Lake, it was staff's belief that there were constraints, making it infeasible. The City was also in the process of developing a master plan for Schutte Park, and the decision was made that this would be the appropriate location for the Splash Park.

Mrs. Townshend noted that the Splash Park was added to the Parks and Recreation Capital Improvement Plan (CIP); however, due to the City's fiscal constraints, it was moved to out years for design in FY15, in the amount of $20,000, and construction in FY16, in the amount of $280,000. She stated that the location at Schutte Park has been discussed with the City Manager, and it has been determined that a public process to evaluate appropriate locations should be undertaken, with a location ultimately to be approved by City Council following a recommendation of the Parks, Recreation and Community Enhancement Committee. She indicated that the City Manager felt that the park should be more centrally located and accessible by walking. Mrs. Townshend indicated that the City has three (3) parks, Schutte Park, Dover Park, and Silver Lake Park. At this time, staff felt that public opinion as to the best location should first be determined and then the City could address infrastructure issues and other concerns so that the design process could begin, with the following schedule being proposed for the Splash Park project: FY14 - Outreach and Siting, FY15 and FY16 - Design and Construction.

Staff recommended that public outreach and the feasibility of potential locations be performed to determine the most suitable location for the proposed Splash Park so that the design can proceed in FY15, with a recommendation being made to the Committee regarding the proposed location following the public outreach.

Responding to Mr. Caldwell, Mrs. Townshend advised members that although there are no other splash parks within the State of Delaware, there are in Pennsylvania (near Delaware) and Maryland. Mr. Caldwell relayed concern regarding the initial and ongoing costs, explaining that there would be costs for maintenance, employees, equipment, etc. He also relayed concerns regarding security and safety.

Mrs. Horsey referred to an article she read in the *Wilmington News Journal* regarding some type of water fountains located throughout the City of Wilmington. She felt that the City of Wilmington may be able to provide additional information regarding costs, design, etc. She indicated her support for obtaining public input regarding the location of the park.

In response to Mr. Dixon, Mr. Scott Koenig, City Manager, indicated that the proposed Splash Park was one of those "nice to have" projects and would not be a revenue generator. He felt that the age group of users of the park needed to be determined since this would determine the actual design of the park.

Regarding costs, Mrs. Townshend explained that instituting a charge for use of the park would only drive costs up since there would be a need for the City to hire someone to ensure users have made payment for use of the park, which was not the original intention.

Mr. Koenig reiterated that staff should be directed to determine if the City was addressing the needs of the right age group and if such a park would be the best method to address the needs of that group. He stated that once that is determined, along with the location, the cost issues would be addressed and explained the possibility that the initial set-up costs may be significant. In addition, he stated that security concerns and issues such as what would happen to the park after hours would need to be further researched before the park could be designed.

In response to Mr. Caldwell's previous concerns, Mr. Koenig confirmed that the City needed to determine whether a splash park was an option desired by the community, noting that currently, there were no water-related activities in the City and that a splash park would be the least expensive option, compared to cleaning up Silver Lake or consideration of a public swimming pool. He explained that there was also a question as to how often such a park would be used.

Concurring with Mr. Caldwell's concerns regarding costs, Mr. Dixon reminded members that the City recently expended funds for basketball courts on Kirkwood Street as well as a playground and park on New Street, which are now seldom used.

Mrs. Horsey moved to recommend that staff be instructed to move forward with the proposed Splash/Spray Park by performing public outreach and examining local parks to determine the most suitable location, taking the concerns expressed by the Committee into consideration, and subsequently presenting the findings to the Committee. The motion was seconded by Mr. Caldwell and unanimously carried.

Future Use of the Dover Park Recreation Center

Mr. Scott Koenig, City Manager, advised members that since the opening of the John W. Pitts Center in April 2008, the demand for use of the Recreation Center building at Dover Park had declined. Although the City continued to rent the Dover Park Recreation Center out for parties, the Pitts Center became the primary focus of the City's recreation programming. He noted that the Recreation Center, which had been a hub of community activity during previous years, no longer served the purposes of the City's recreation programming and that programs that were scheduled for the Recreation Center were frequently cancelled due to low attendance.

Mr. Koenig also advised members that the building, which was constructed in 1974, had become dated and in need of investment to maintain functionality. He stated that staff offices continued to be located at the Recreation Center until August 2012, when all Recreation staff were relocated to the Pitts Center. He indicated that the City had discontinued rental of the building and that the FY2013 budget included $30,000 in the Capital Improvement Plan (CIP) to replace the roof of the building, explaining that the roof had routinely been patched to repair leaks.

Mr. Koenig reminded members that during FY2013, there was discussion about potentially renting the building out to a non-profit organization. Before investing funds to replace the roof and pursuing the potential of leasing the building to a non-profit organization, staff felt it was important to do a full assessment of the building to determine what other investments would be necessary to make the building functional, as all of the building's systems were dated and in need of some update. As a result, he stated that Compliance Environmental, Inc., was retained to do a Building Condition Survey. Members reviewed the "Report of Findings from a Building Condition Survey" dated May 6, 2013. Mr. Koenig noted that Table 1 in Attachment A included a summary of the recommended repairs as well as cost estimates. He advised members that although the Building Condition Survey did not include a structural engineering report, if City Council wished to keep the building and renovate it, staff would recommend that a structural engineering report be obtained prior to any renovations. However, based on the information contained in the Building Condition Survey, he stated that staff recommended demolition of the structure and noted that the costs associated with demolition, estimated at $20,000 for Asbestos Removal and $30,000 for Demolition (bids would require City Council approval), were not currently budgeted.

Staff recommended that the Recreation Center building at Dover Park be demolished.

Mr. Caldwell indicated his concerns regarding the demolition of the building and felt that this would cause the City to lose funds. Responding, Mrs. Townshend advised members that the YMCA was currently using the building for their Summer Camp Program and that they had a separate reservation for fields and pavilions. She noted the benefit of having a presence in the park since there had been problems with vandalism (broken windows) and that the City had been spending money to maintain the building. One of the benefits of the YMCA utilizing the building was that the associated agreement included a provision that the YMCA was responsible for paying the utility bill.

Mrs. Townshend stated that the City would need to make a significant investment to complete the renovations that would be required to the building and that it would be less expensive to demolish it. She explained that not only had the design of the building caused the City a great deal of money, but there were other concerns with the building, such as lead paint and asbestos issues, as mentioned in the Building Survey Report.

Mrs. Horsey indicated that she typically opposes the demolition of buildings; however, she was aware of the substantial costs the building had caused the City, as well as the issues included in the Building Survey Report.

Mr. Koenig noted that it would cost the City approximately $150,000 to $170,000 in order to address those issues listed in the Building Survey Report. If Council decided to move forward with addressing those issues, he explained, the next question would be for what purpose the City would use the building and what type of security would be utilized. If the building were demolished, he indicated that staff would need to develop an alternative plan for the use of the site.

In response to concerns that the City would discount the park if the building were removed, Mrs. Townshend assured members that this was not staff's intent, explaining that the City's best tennis courts are located there and continued to be used, a church softball league played there, the YMCA used the multi-purpose field this year for its soccer program, etc. Noting that it was a beautiful City park, she explained the need for staff to determine how to increase use of the park and develop a plan to make it a community asset.

Mrs. Horsey moved to recommend moving forward with the demolition of the Dover Park Recreation Center building, based on the reports provided, as recommended by staff. The motion was seconded by Mr. Caldwell and unanimously carried.

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

Meeting adjourned at 12:50 p.m.

Wallace R. Dixon
Chairman

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