

***City-Parish Recreation Advisory Commission
Programs Committee
March 11, 2024 Meeting Minutes***

Present: Tim Sensley, Judy Placer, Larry Lanclos, Kristopher Harrison, Thaddeus Shelvin, Raymond Mallery, Ross Gresham, Alena Fields, Nourine Lanerie

Committee Chairperson Judy Placer calls the meeting to order at 5:32 p.m. Opened with a Prayer and Pledge of Allegiance

Recognition of Guests/Staff Members:

Committee Chairperson Judy Placer welcomes the commissioners and staff in attendance. She welcomes the guests; Jennifer Simms with Destiny Swim, Kathy Ruckstuhl with Acadiana Tennis Association, Bobby Lenore and Merlin Leger.

Judy advises that this committee meeting is to discuss programs outside of the regular commission meeting. Judy welcomes the new commissioner, Kristopher Harrison, who was appointed by District 2 City Councilman Andy Naquin.

Brown Park Association Election

Judy advises that Brown Park Association (BPA), the youth association for that area, is undergoing a big transition. Larry advises that he met with Tim and Ross last week regarding the board of directors for BPA. They do not have an official active board; the last recognized board was in 2022. There will be an election Thursday night to elect 19 board members. Once that board is elected, that board can amend the bylaws to amend the number of board members. Tim adds that the board elected will serve as the interim board until August when the annual election is held. Those elected in August will start serving in January 1, 2025. The purpose of the meeting is to have a board that can represent the Brown Park community. Judy asks if the executive board is formed from the 19 elected board members. Tim confirms that they are. Larry advises that the commission members will be responsible for counting the votes at the election. Judy advises that 19 is a lot for a board and they might not have enough nominated. Merlin adds that the number was reduced to 15 years ago. Tim explains that they do not have any documentation stating that the number was reduced to 15; therefore, they have to abide by the current by-laws.

Judy asks for an update on how the finances for BPA are functioning. Tim explains that the financial issues are one of the reasons they need to get a board in place. Judy asks if the collected registration fees are being processed through LCG. Tim advises that nothing is handled through the department. Judy asks if the kids are still participating in sports. Ross advises that they are not playing under the LCG umbrella; any programs that are run under BPA are not affiliated programs. Larry asks if the programs are held at Brown Park. Ross explains that they were not allowed to play in the gym at the Dupuis Recreation Center. Thaddeus advises that they are playing at the local high schools. Ross adds that the department also registered kids in that area to play at other gyms within the city.

Judy asks for an update on the baseball season for Brown Park participants. Tim explains that plans are underway to make sure the kids have a place to play baseball at other venues in that area. Judy advises that the election meeting will be held on March 14th at the Dupuis Recreation Center and she encourages all commissioners to attend. Thaddeus asks Tim to explain how the election process will work and how interested individuals can put their names in for consideration. Tim explains that there are four different eligibility requirements: (1) have a kid that plays at Brown Park, (2) coach at Brown Park, (3) officiate at Brown Park, or (4) live in the Brown Park community. Larry adds that they have to submit their request in writing to Tim. Thaddeus asks for clarification on the "community." Tim explains that the "community" includes anyone who is zoned to play at Brown Park. Thaddeus asks for clarification on where that zone

is. Ross advises that he will have to get that information and report back to the commission. Thaddeus explains that in the past there were three different associations who merged together to form BPA. Ross confirms that it includes all of the areas those associations were in. Tim advises that the department has no control over the board, only to help one get established. Ross adds that they are supposed to turn in financial monthly reports to the department; however, none have been received. Larry asks if there are any records of any being turned into the department in the past. Tim confirms that they were turned in prior to the internal conflict that arose. Unfortunately, the kids in that area are being adversely impacted while the adults work out their differences.

Tennis

Judy distributes a photo of the tennis courts at Thomas Park. Judy advises that the courts are not playable and there was also a recent accident where a lady fell on the damaged courts. Judy add that this really bothers her, especially since she brought up her concern months ago and there is money allocated to fix those courts. They should be closed until they can be fixed. Four years ago, she went to Shreveport with Kathy Ruckstuhl and Councilwoman Nanette Cook to look at the Querbes Tennis Center. Their goal was to see if Beaver Park tennis could be similar to Querbes, and it now is. They also toured Shreveport's equivalent to Thomas Park. It is considered their junior center; they have plenty of hard courts and it is well taken care of. Kids are bussed in after school to start their junior programs. Judy advises that she was hopeful that Thomas Park would be like that. She was hoping it could be named after Red Dumestihl. When she was a child, he got her to play tennis and he is still a big influence in this city. Something needs to get going at Thomas Park and it needs to be safe.

Ms. Ruckstuhl advises that there was \$250,000 allocated for the Thomas Park tennis courts project, and \$50,000 is being used for the resurfacing of four courts. The post tension courts construction runs around \$475,000 and includes lighting and fencing. They are also lacking on the ADA compliance requirements; therefore, the architect has made accommodations to make sure the new courts will be ADA specific. This project should have been done two years ago, but it keeps getting pushed back. Thomas Park is a gem in the making, especially since it is in the middle of town and is available for different demographics. There are two high school teams playing there with subpar conditions and a league playing there which has 1,000 players. Calvin Kemp, the tennis pro, has no income coming in from Thomas Park because the courts are unplayable. No additional programming can be scheduled because there are not enough courts to play on. Ms. Ruckstuhl advises that she hopes things will get moving now with the new director. The bathrooms are also disgusting at Thomas Park and there is also a homeless issue. There is no activity going on there to make it a vibrant place to deter other activities from taking place and building the skate park will not eliminate the issue. There are so many factors that come into play. Ms. Ruckstuhl advises that they have a public private partnership with LCG and have saved them over \$100,000 per year in payroll costs. They bring in three to four state tournaments each year, which generate over \$2.5 million dollar in economic impact with over 2,600 players attending. There is so much programming going on at Beaver Park and it needs to be going on at Thomas Park as well. She asks the commission for their help in making sure the project gets done at Thomas. She feels like they have held up their end of the partnership; LCG is responsible for capital projects and maintenance of the tennis facilities. It frustrates her to hear of new things getting built with no respect for things that are already there and have established programming. Ideally, a 12-court facility is needed with a pro shop, indoor restrooms to bring in high school tennis, middle school tennis, state tournaments, collegiate tennis, corporate events, and ladies' leagues. More partnerships can be built if the facility is there. Ms. Ruckstuhl add that tennis is established and is not going anywhere.

Judy advises that there was supposed to be two additional courts built at Thomas, so not being able to resurface the courts is not understandable. They could use some of the sales tax money to finish projects. Judy asks Ms. Ruckstuhl if the courts are shut down due to the conditions. Ms. Ruckstuhl advises that the courts are not shut down. Portable restrooms and other amenities have to be brought in for tournaments due to the condition of the current restrooms. The Acadiana area won 10 out of 19 awards at the Louisiana

State Association this past year. Out of those 10, four won Southern awards. Calvin Kemp, the tennis pro, won pro of the year in the Southern section, due to his work at Beaver Park.

Larry asks for an update on the Thomas tennis courts project. Tim explains that he will meet with Public Works at Thomas Park tomorrow to come up with a plan to get the courts done as soon as possible. There is \$60,000 allocated to resurface the four courts and that project will be expedited. The remaining \$190,000 was allocated to redo the other four courts; however, that amount was not budgeted accurately. The cost is closer to \$490,000. He has also invited Kathy Ruckstuhl to attend the meeting tomorrow. Tim advises that there are a lot of things that were promised, but not budgeted accurately. He is doing his very best to thoroughly investigate everything and hopefully everything that was promised to the community can be fulfilled. He asks everyone for their patience as he does his due diligence to try and reconcile the situation as swiftly and efficiently as he possibly can. Judy advises that it has been discussed for so long and it is time to get it done. Larry suggests that the \$500,000 allocated for pickleball two years ago be transferred to the tennis project. Tim advises that he will look into it to see if it will be a feasible option. He does not want to take from one group and give to another if it is not feasible. He does realize that there is a need; he cannot speak to what was promised, but he is doing his best to make sure he has a concise direction to move in. Ms. Ruckstuhl advises that her concern is that funds allocated for projects in the past were not sufficient, so the funds end up not being used. The plan is not to rob Peter to pay Paul, but if the money can be transferred within the parks, it would be better to use it rather than letting it go to waste. Ms. Ruckstuhl advises that Calvin Kemp was promised 21 total courts; 13 at Beaver Park and eight at Thomas Park. He currently has 11 at Beaver Park and four at Thomas Park. This poses a huge economic impact to him and the organization.

Tim advises that he understands the theory to open the centers up in the morning for pickleball; however, the department was hit the hardest when it comes to staffing. A total of 37 permanent employees were laid off in 2020 and only nine of those positions put back in. Alena adds that if there is an organization that will partner with LCG to provide pickleball, more playtime would be available. Ms. Ruckstuhl suggests that the pickleball community organize a non-profit organization to partner with LCG. The Acadiana Tennis Association cannot put them under their umbrella, due to the limitations by the United States Tennis Association (USTA). The volunteers could then work in the centers for pickleball play. Larry advises that the Aging Cajuns pickleball group have been around for a long time; however, they have not formed a non-profit organization. Ms. Ruckstuhl explains that they have to carry a certain amount of insurance, so there are costs associated with forming a non-profit. Judy asks if there is a fee charged to play pickleball. Alena advises that there is no fee charged at the recreation centers. Judy suggests that a fee be charged to offset the expenses. Larry explains that the idea was to have a non-profit take over and charge at the facilities where there is currently no pickleball being played. Thaddeus asks which facilities are hosting pickleball. Alena explains that Thomas is the main hub for pickleball and Dupuis has it available on Mondays. Preparations are underway for pickleball to be offered at the Domingue Center and also at Comeaux after basketball season. Larry advises that any facility that has a gym could be used; however, there would have to be an organization that is willing to partner with LCG. Discussion follows.

Swimming

Judy introduces and welcomes Jennifer Simms, with Destiny Camp Swimming. Ms. Simms advises that Destiny Camp is a non-profit organization and they have been working with LCG since 2014 teaching lessons at the OJ Mouton Pool. After covid, they began using the Martin Luther King Center pool. Ms. Simms explains that her staff sets up the program and charges the participants a minimal fee for the swimming lessons. The sessions are one hour long and the cost is \$60. Water aerobics and swimming lessons are offered for the flat fee of \$60. LCG has been instrumental in helping with the lifeguard fees, when the funding was available. The lessons are offered in the mornings from 9:00 - 12:30 and in the evenings from 6:15 - 8:15. The minimum age requirement is five years old. Since being at MLK, she has been pushing swimming programs for senior citizens. The Earl J. Chris pool cannot be heated and senior

citizens need a heated pool. The MLK pool is not designed for swim meets, so it is good for seniors. There were six seniors that participated last year and that number has increased to 37 this year. Last summer, there were over 300 total participants. She is willing to teach the Red Cross lifeguard class to assist LCG with hiring lifeguards. She is the only one teaching lifeguard classes, besides UL. Lifeguarding is a high commodity and the average rate of pay in other cities is between \$15-\$20 per hour. LCG is paying around \$13. Ms. Simms adds that she has subcontracted herself out to teach lifeguarding classes in other parishes as well.

Larry asks for more details on the swimming lessons for children. Ms. Simms explains that the lessons are open to all children and the cost is \$60. Upon completion of the course, 90% of the participants can do the front and back crawls. She is an enthusiast and wants to see people in the city learn how to swim. The summer camps in the past used to allow the kids to just "play" in the pool and that was not safe. She spoke with the Administration and Mr. Boudreaux in 2013 and stressed the importance of teaching the kids to swim. She was at the OJ Mouton pool years ago when an accident happened, and she was the lifeguard involved. Ms. Simms advises that 62% of African-Americans cannot swim and the Caucasian numbers are rising as well. There are no longer YMCA's in the city and recreation centers are not offering lessons. There are so many that are terrified. Her passion for this started when her husband's brother drowned.

Judy asks for clarification on the City of Lafayette Aquatics' (COLA) role in swimming. Ross explains that they have a public private partnership with LCG to run the Earl J. Chris pool. LCG is responsible for the large capital improvements and COLA pays for the day to day maintenance costs. Judy asks how the partnership works at MLK pool. Ross explains that Ms. Simms offers the lessons and LCG operates the open swim days. Merlin asks for the schedule of open swim. Ross advises that it is limited to when lifeguards are available; therefore, it is not often. It is typically three to five days a week from 2:00 – 6:00 in the afternoons and the cost is \$6 for 18 and over and \$4 for under 18. Ms. Simms adds that she works around LCG's schedule to offer lessons at an affordable rate. She also works with the Autistic City to get those kids involved with aquatics.

Thaddeus asks for an update on the status of OJ Mouton Pool. Ross advises that it needs to be completely redone. Thaddeus suggests that funds be allocated towards fixing OJ Mouton pool for senior citizens to use. Ross advises that it would cost millions of dollars to fix. Judy asks for an update on the Girard Park pool. Ross advises that Girard needs repairs as well; however, not as many repairs as OJ Mouton. Thaddeus asks for an update on the plan for the OJ Mouton pool. Ross advises that there is no plan for the OJ Mouton pool. Tim adds that the holdup is due to the finances; there are many projects in need of funds; however, there are only so many funds. A strategic plan needs to be developed to find out what can realistically be provided to get everyone up and running in a timely fashion. He plans to put together a viable plan that has realistic timelines and realistic numbers to achieve a realistic goal. Tim adds that there are a lot of projects that are on hold right now due to funding issues.

Ms. Simms advises that the citizens of the MLK community went before the City Council to ask for funding to enclose the MLK pool, so that the hours of operation could be expanded. There are four schools in the MLK Center area and she would like to partner with the schools to bus the kids in for lessons. There is a need for a bigger swimming facility. Tim adds that the OJ Mouton pool is the only outdoor Olympic sized swimming pool in the entire state. Ms. Simms advises that when OJ Mouton closed due to the pandemic, they were faced with the challenge of finding a place to teach swimming lessons. Alena adds that even if the pools are reopened, the staffing of lifeguards is still an issue. Jennifer advises that even though she advertises the lifeguard training, it is still hard to get them. Larry suggests that LCG increase the salary for lifeguards to attract more applicants. Jennifer adds that the staffing issue is nationwide. The minimum certification age for lifeguards is 15. Parents will pay for them to get certified when they are in school; however, once they are in college, they do not want to pay for the recertification. She offers a junior lifeguard program in order to grow lifeguards.

Larry asks for an update on the MLK pool enclosure. Tim explains that he met with Councilman Broussard regarding moving forward with the project. There was \$800,000 allocated for the project; however, it may not be enough. The MLK pool was designed to be an outdoor pool and the project is to enclose the entire pool area; therefore, there are a few issues.

Judy advises that she would like to see the Girard Park pool open up again. If the OJ Mouton pool cannot be reopened, it should be filled in and used for something else. Ms. Simms adds that a lot of recreation departments are going to splash pads instead of swimming pools. The splash pads require regular keep up and maintenance, as they are very slick and pose safety hazards. Kids are just not swimming these days. Tim adds that kids are not participating in outdoor activities due to all of the technology that is available these days. Ms. Simms agrees and advises that outdoor activities have to be introduced to kids early when they are in elementary school.

Senior Center Programming

Judy advises that she spoke with District 4 City Councilman, Thomas Hooks, and he informed her about problems with some of the programming at the senior centers. Alena explains that a few loud constituents were upset about an art class. The senior centers were previously under Community Development and when the departments merged, they came under PARC. When she inherited the senior centers, they came with a lot less than they had at Community Development. They did not even have a full-time staff in their budget. It took two years to get the funds added to the budget to get staff and the programming is now back up and running. Alena advises that Tim contacted the Benoit Gallery and Mr. Benoit has agreed to provide the senior centers with art classes. A meet and greet will be held in April and he will be able to provide lessons to the seniors. The money that was provided for the programming was not put back in the budget; therefore, the instructors are volunteers. When the senior centers were under Community Development, they were able to pay the instructors.

Staffing Concerns

Alena advises that there are ten recreation centers, but only five full-time coordinators and six full-time janitors. Covid is long gone, but the budget remains the same. The skeleton staff is asked to provide the same amount of work that was available before covid. If programming is wanted at all ten centers, the staff has to be budgeted to support it. There are also many rentals on weekends that have to be staffed. Judy advises that there is a hiring problem across the nation; however, this seems to be a funding issue.

Judy asks for an update on the summer camps. Alena explains that summer camps will be held at the Robicheaux, Comeaux and MLK Centers. The J. Carlton James Center will also host a camp and Ms. Simms will utilize the MLK pool for her summer programming.

Program Recognition

Judy welcomes and introduces Bobby Lenore. She was recently at Acadiana Park to look at the tennis courts and she met Mr. Lenore there. He picks up trash, weed eats, fixes the wind screens, and does whatever else needs to be done. He takes pride in Acadiana Park and volunteers his time to keep it up. He is part of a group of senior men tennis players who love to play at Acadiana Park tennis courts. Judy thanks him for all that he does.

Judy advises that the Acadiana Tennis Association won many awards at the USTA level and she wanted to formally recognize and thank them. She is hopeful that LCG can keep Thomas and Beaver functional for them to run their programming.

Larry Lanclos motions to adjourn; seconded by Raymond Mallery; no opposition; motion passed unanimously. Meeting adjourned at 6:47 p.m.