

VERO BEACH RECREATION COMMISSION MINUTES

Tuesday, January 11, 2022 – 1:30 p.m.

City Hall, Council Chambers, Vero Beach, Florida

PRESENT: Chairman, Brooke Steinkamp; Vice Chairman, Christopher Woodruff Members: Samuel Lapeyre, Rick Gillespie and Leonard Markir **Also Present:** Recreation Director, James O’Connell; Assistant Recreation Director, Patty Howard; Assistant City Attorney, Jenny Flanigan; and Senior Administrative Assistant, Rita Chartier

1. CALL TO ORDER

Chairman Steinkamp called today’s meeting to order at 1:30 p.m. and the Senior Administrative Assistant performed the roll call.

2. APPROVAL OF MINUTES

A) November 9, 2021

Mr. Gillespie made a motion to approve the minutes of the November 9, 2021 Recreation Commission meeting. Mr. Markir seconded the motion and it passed unanimously.

3. PUBLIC COMMENT

Mr. Steve Newman, Vero Beach resident, said that he is part of a group of tennis players that play at Riverside Park every day. He stated that he has a batch of questions from the group that they hope will get answered during the presentation. He said that most people sign up for a yearly membership, so they would like to know if those paid memberships will be honored for the entire year and if not, will they be reimbursed. The same thing applies to the Round Robins. People are also allowed to pay and sign up for Round Robbins in advance so they do not have to pay each time.

Ms. Jenny Flanigan, Assistant City Attorney, said that since his questions pertain to an agenda item she would recommend that he save his questions for that specific item. The presentation might answer his questions and if not he can ask them then.

Mrs. Rita Chartier, Senior Administrative Assistant, read letters into the record from Mrs. Rosemary White and Mrs. Phyllis Frey (on file in the City Clerk’s office).

Mr. Markir said that when he attended the Steering Committee meeting he learned that there was a Comprehensive Plan, which was assembled in a way to create a relationship between the City and a prospective developer. Upon negotiations between the City and the developer, the developer would be given control over the entire parcel. The Comprehensive Plan is published, but a lot of the decisions cannot be made until the developer is selected.

4. NEW BUSINESS

A) Presentation by the United States Tennis Association (USTA)– Mr. Frank Swope and Ms. Laura Bowen

Ms. Laura Bowen, Executive Director of USTA Florida, stated that she has been with USTA Florida for over 10 years. She services municipalities to help grow tennis locally in public Park space. She explained that USTA Florida is a not-for-profit volunteer run organization. They are a 501(c)(4) organization. They also have a sister company that is a 501(c)(3) organization, which provides grant funding. They give out over \$100,000 in grants every year specifically to grow the game of tennis and to provide for community programs, support, and facility improvements. She continued by giving a Power Point Presentation (attached to the original minutes). She said they have nine (9) volunteers who serve on their Board and half of them have run public facilities in their time and they serve as an advisory group to support their effort. They also have hundreds of volunteers throughout Florida that help run their programs. USTA Florida exists to delivery programs and services, not to make money. They have invested over \$2 million dollars in three (3) municipalities' facilities that they have managed over the last four (4) years without making a profit. When they go into manage a facility they work alongside the existing staff to deliver services to their members the way the municipality sees fit. They don't change the membership and the fee structure, but instead they leave that up to the City. USTA Florida develops a plan for managing and delivering services that the City feels comfortable with to ensure they are providing more to their citizens.

Mr. Frank Swope, Director of Tennis Management for USTA Florida, said he was brought on board with USTA Florida in November, 2017. He has been a lifelong tennis player and he has been in the industry for over 40 years. He is professionally certified and he has managed several tennis clubs over the years. He continued with the Power Point presentation and discussed why the City should partner with them, their marketing strategy, their staff, programs, and pricing. He played a short video as part of the Power Point presentation. He explained that they manage three (3) facilities in Florida, which are located in Cocoa Beach, Fort Walton Beach, and Gainesville.

Mrs. Steinkamp said she understands that the Recreation Department would still be determining the fees, but will the public still have free time on the courts without being members. Mr. Swope replied if that is one (1) of the stipulations, they do offer hours in the afternoon.

Mrs. Steinkamp asked if the City has one (1) or two (2) employees at the tennis facility. Mr. O'Connell replied that they have one (1) full time employee and as part of their negotiations, they are looking at having her come on board with USTA Florida if she desires. Ms. Bowen said as a requirement, everyone who works at their facilities are USTA Florida employees. They have not done the preliminary work of evaluating bringing on an employee and that will happen later in the negotiations. They also have an Advisory Board who will have to approve this. They will provide the Board with a plan and a budget along with the terms of the agreement.

Mrs. Steinkamp asked if they will be able to honor the Saint Edwards School contract. Mr. O'Connell said that part of their negotiations is that they would keep that contract intact. He explained that the reason they are presenting this today is because they have had some preliminary discussions with USTA Florida. They would like the Recreation Commission to make a recommendation to continue those discussions in hopes of forming a contract that they can present to City Council.

Mrs. Steinkamp asked if the Recreation Commission will able to look at the contract and review it before they make a final recommendation to City Council. Mr. O'Connell replied yes, but ultimately it is City Council who makes the final approval.

Mr. Markir asked if USTA Florida could provide a broad overview of how they would change the operation of the tennis facility. Ms. Bowen replied that most of the terms they are asking for are very common, such as High Schools using the courts and the Marty Fish Foundation. The only item out of the normal discussions and agreements is the employee arrangement. They feel the youth space is an area that needs work. If they are closing their facility from 12:00 p.m. to 5:00 p.m. and not offering any youth programs after 3:00 p.m. then they are missing out on an opportunity to serve that part of the community. They have had great success introducing youth programs at their other facilities that were not previously offered.

Mr. O'Connell explained USTA Florida is in a position to offer programming and activities that the Recreation Department does not have and the ability or staffing levels for, so USTA Florida will greatly expand what they can offer.

Mr. Gillespie asked if the nature of the agreement will be a lease or service agreement. Ms. Bowen replied that it is typically a multiyear lease agreement and generally it has an out clause. There is no exchange of property or land, so they are leasing the facility to deliver the programs under the parameters set by the City. If other groups need access to the courts on specific dates and times then that would be written into the agreement.

Mr. Gillespie asked who is responsible for the upkeep of the facilities, the court, the nets, etc. Ms. Bowen said it depends on how they write the contract, but typically the City would maintain the landscaping and any hard structures, such as buildings. The resurfacing of the four (4) courts is something they can bring to the table as an investment.

Mr. Gillespie asked Mr. O'Connell if he would expect USTA Florida to be responsible for the upkeep, and resurfacing of the courts. Mr. O'Connell said they would work with USTA Florida to get any improvements they can and if the City does not have to spend the money to resurface the courts they could certainly find other uses for those funds.

Mr. Gillespie asked what is going to happen with the existing racquet ball courts at Riverside Park that were damaged by a hurricane. He asked will they be part of this agreement. Mr. O'Connell stated they currently do not have any plans for that facility and it probably will not be included in the agreement at this time.

Mr. Gillespie said the marketing aspect is very important, so how do they reach out to get more of the community involved. Does USTA Florida see any relevance with any of the programs at their other locations that they believe would work well here. Mr. Swope stated that each of their facilities have slightly different needs and demographics. He said their organization has done very well with the marketing. Ms. Bowen explained that they have a full service marketing department that handles everything from press and media relations to video productions, emails, and social media. They would put in a point of sale system where people can see what is available, they can sign up, and pay for it all online.

Mrs. Steinkamp said that they have nonprofits that utilize Park space and she is a huge supporter of them. She wants to make sure this is going to be a fair exchange for the community and that they have the same ability to access the courts without any added burden or costs.

Ms. Bowen said if they want to contact the other three (3) municipalities she can provide them with their contact information.

Mr. Markir stated things like hours and rates are constantly changing, so how would they take a fixed lease agreement and amend it over time. Ms. Bowen explained that each year they meet with the municipality and discuss what has taken place. It is important that they work with the Recreation Department staff to make sure everything is meeting their expectations. The City will receive quarterly reports and the City will have access to the point of sale system so they can see what is happening with every court reservation, the impact of the fees, if the bookings are going up or down, etc.

Mr. Markir asked Mr. O'Connell how will he conclude that the negotiations are at a point to bring it back to the Recreation Commission. Mr. O'Connell replied that will take place when they have a contract that works for both sides, but there are a lot of details to work out. Based on the discussions with USTA Florida, they thought this skeleton agreement needed to come to the Recreation Commission for input.

Mr. Markir asked what is the timeline between the City and USTA Florida. Mr. O'Connell stated that they are looking at USTA Florida having a launch date of June 1, 2022, which is ambitious. If they have to push it back, then it would be more around late September or early October.

Mr. Markir asked what is the City's peak busy time for these activities. Mr. O'Connell replied this is the busy time of year for the facility. What he thinks this agreement will change is that USTA Florida will bring in a lot more youth programming and after school activities, so their summers might be busier.

Mrs. Steinkamp asked if the audit of the Riverside Tennis Complex is still being done by the Finance Director. Mr. O'Connell said that was for fees and she has not finished it yet. They will probably finish the fee structure concurrently with adopting this agreement.

Mr. Gillespie said this might be a great opportunity to simplify the fee structure.

Ms. Bowen stated that the City's regular court fees are high, but their annual passes are low compared to other facilities.

Mr. Markir asked Mr. O'Connell if he is looking for anything from the Recreation Commission today. Mr. O'Connell replied he is looking for the Recreation Commission to recommend to City Council that they continue this process and work towards a contract, which can be reviewed by this Commission and then be presented to City Council.

Mrs. Steinkamp stated that she is not comfortable making a recommendation not knowing exactly what they are recommending. That is why she asked if their Commission could look at the contract before a formal recommendation is made.

Ms. Flanigan said she would recommend that they come up with a few priorities for the contract. This was more of a global presentation and the details will be worked out with the consensus from this Commission that they can move forward.

Mr. Markir asked if the USTA Florida has a standard contract already prepared that they can look at. Ms. Bowen explained that there is no standard contract, but they agreed to provide a sample of an agreement to the Recreation Department staff. They really want to hear what is important to the community and the Recreation Commission.

Mrs. Steinkamp opened the meeting for public comments at this time.

Ms. Kathy Champigny, County resident, said she has lived in Vero Beach since 1983 and has been playing tennis at Riverside Park for many years. Before she retired, she traveled between many cities in California with her job and she never had to pay anything to play tennis. When she retired in Vero Beach she was floored at the price she was quoted to play tennis. Vero Beach is a big tennis town and she thinks that USTA Florida brings a lot to the table, so she supports them coming here. She mostly supports the youth programs they will bring as well as the courts being resurfaced and the lights being changed. She understands the need for fees at Riverside Park, but they are outrageous and that is what has caused the decline. If USTA Florida can realign the costs it will make it better for everyone.

Mr. Newman said he would still like to confirm that people with memberships and Round Robin tickets could still be used without any extra cost. He is a snowbird and pays for an annual tennis pass in New York, but it only costs 10 percent of what he pays here. The fees are kept low in New York to encourage exercise for the health benefits. He said he plays tennis with several people at 7:30 in the morning, so he would like to know if the courts will still be open at that time. Many of the tennis players feel that the City employees should be kept with the same pay, benefits and pension, because they do a wonderful job and they should not suffer any loss from this. There is also a tennis professional there that does an excellent job with teaching tennis, so hopefully he will still have an opportunity.

Mr. Allan Campbell said he and his wife are members of the Riverside Racquet Club. They have been associated with Riverside Tennis since the late 1980's when their daughter was a great junior tennis player there. At that time, the lessons and tournaments were very promising. He has no problem with the existing staff and he does not think they need to be replaced, but the club has become dormant. Many of the programs are gone except for a few clinics. He thinks there is a lot more out there that could be done at the club, because it is a cross road for tennis, and junior tennis and that is not happening now. They deserve to give USTA Florida a chance.

Mrs. Steinkamp said in the past, there have been some contracts with the City that some people in the community were not happy with. She wants to make sure they are answering all of the questions about the areas of concern from the community. She asked the Commission members if they would like to set some priorities for USTA Florida and the Recreation Department.

Mr. Markir asked Mr. O'Connell if he would discuss this at their next Recreation Commission meeting to let them know what they have accomplished, if they ask him to move forward. Mr. O'Connell stated that as they make progress he will be reporting back to the Recreation Commission with updates at their monthly meetings or emails to keep them up to date.

Mrs. Steinkamp asked if the Commission members want to set a list of priorities for this contract, or just approve it based on what they have heard so far.

Mr. Markir stated that he thinks it would be prudent to let everyone know what criteria they are looking for in a contract when a presentation is made to them. He would like to finalize their criteria list and submit it to everyone so they have a chance to review it. Mrs. Steinkamp said she agrees and they will forward it once they have discussed it (item 4-B).

Mrs. Steinkamp said what she is hearing from the public is that the tennis facilities at Riverside Park are underused and overpriced. Mr. O'Connell said he agrees that utilization is an issue and some of the fees need to be adjusted. He would love to not charge anyone, but the City cannot afford that. However, they do still have two (2) courts at Charles Park that are open to the public and free of charge. As part of the contract with USTA Florida, they will still have some hours at Riverside Park that will be free to the public.

Mrs. Steinkamp said Ms. Bowen mentioned that the free play hours needed tweaking, so maybe they can prioritize adjusting the free play hours for the public as well as the fees to reflect what USTA Florida believes to be typical. Mr. O'Connell replied that they will be making adjustments to the fees even if this contract does not come to be.

Ms. Bowen said that her recommendation is allow them to do a little bit of the preliminary work. She is hearing that they want all of the employees to stay and to keep some open play time. They will be happy to provide them with an assessment and recommendation whether they sign a contract or not. She explained that the higher the personnel costs the higher the fees will go. They need to find a way to balance what programs they offer, how to keep cost low, and free play time. They can certainly come back with a sample model of what a facility like this would look like and how it might run. With that information they might be able to have some better conversations about the priorities and how the contract should come together.

Mr. Markir said that any recommendations that USTA Florida can make for the fee structure would be helpful. Mrs. Bowen replied that Florida is unique and that is what they know best, so they will gladly share what they see and give them some examples to look at.

Mr. Markir made a motion that the Recreation Commission is in favor of moving forward with negotiations with USTA Florida. Mr. Gillespie seconded the motion and it passed unanimously.

**B) Develop a Framework for Future Proposals for the Use of Public Park Spaces
– Mr. Leonard Markir**

Mrs. Steinkamp explained that an idea was brought up about developing a structure for accepting proposals for the use of public Park spaces.

Mr. Markir stated they are trying to develop a set of criteria to provide consistency on how they make decisions on proposals, like the one (1) that just came before them. He showed his plan on the doc cam and he went over his proposal so they can present it to City Council for their approval (attached to the original minutes). He read a prepared statement on how he believes this should be handled (attached to the original minutes). Mr. Gillespie said Mr. Marker's description as a frame work is spot on. It serves as a check list for just about anything that would come before the Recreation Commission. It is general enough and well done. Mrs. Steinkamp said she agrees it is general enough so that the organization making a proposal can stay within the guidelines of what

their requirements are. She believes it will cut down on a lot of confusion by the public, because there will be more of a parameter they will be following.

Mr. O'Connell stated that this is a very common sense application of what their Commission is doing when a proposal comes before them. By putting it in writing, it clarifies their decision in case there is any doubt about how they deliberated. He said the proposal that was just presented to them addresses all five (5) of the items they listed. He commends them for taking this step to clarify how they go through their thinking process. As a department head, it also a good guide for him when something is presented to his department.

Mr. Newman said he agrees that the concept is good and he agrees with all of them, except one (1). He said he could easily picture proposals that could actually cost the City money, but they are still worth doing for the community.

Ms. Flanigan stated just as a rule, they try to avoid using the word "must", because there is always an exception to every rule. She suggested that they reword the criteria as questions, or use the word "should". She agrees that it is a great outline and they are on the right track. If they are making an administrative or policy change then it will need to go before City Council for their approval. Mr. Markir replied that he is not sure they are making a policy change, but just identifying the criteria that they want to use to look at proposals. Ms. Flanigan said since they are an Advisory Board to City Council, if they are changing how they are rendering advice she would recommend they have City Council approve it. She believes City Council would be pleased that they are taking the initiative to evaluate proposals in such a reasonable way. Mr. Markir asked how should they word that to City Council. Ms. Flanigan stated they have not voted on it yet, but she would recommend that the Commission select the format they wish to use and put it into a memo to present it to City Council. Mrs. Steinkamp stated that she likes it in the form of a question opposed to using the word "should". Ms. Flanigan explained that if they pass a motion she will prepare the memo with the changes they discussed and pose them as questions. She will also advise that this is how the Commission will be presenting recommendations to them going forward and these are the parameters or questions the Recreation Commission will answer.

Mrs. Steinkamp suggested they make a motion to put the criteria in the form of questions and put it in a memo to be presented to City council.

Mr. Gillespie made a motion to submit this framework for reviewing future proposals to City Council. Mrs. Steinkamp seconded the motion and it passed unanimously.

5. OLD BUSINESS

A) Youth Sports

Mrs. Steinkamp asked if they can set a date for a workshop to discuss youth sports. She said if USTA Florida wants to be involved that would be great.

Mr. O'Connell stated that in the past they have discussed what sports are available and this ties in nicely with USTA Florida to see what they will offer. He said they can have a more informal discussion on youth sports if they want. Mrs. Steinkamp said they were discussing looking for

grants. Mr. O'Connell replied that he does not have anything specific on grants with youth sports, so he suggested that they table this until a later date when they have more information available.

6. RECREATION DIRECTOR'S MATTERS

A) Recap of Aerial Antics Youth Circus Christmas Drama– December 5, 2021

Mrs. Patty Howard, Assistant Recreation Director, reported that they had the annual Christmas holiday production on December 5th at the Vero Beach High School Performing Arts Center and it was called "Enchanted Christmas Ball". She announced that they had a guest writer this year, Ilyana Reed. She is a member of their staff, but her future plans are to become a Disney Imagineer. Ms. Reed helped them write the show and was the narrator. It turned out amazing and they had large crowds at both shows.

Mrs. Howard stated that they have their next gymnastics registration starting on January 22, 2022 and this session ends with a performance at the Indian River County Firefighters Fair.

B) 19th Annual Mother & Daughter Tea Party – February 5, 2022

Mrs. Howard announced that the 19th annual Mother and Daughter Tea Party will be on February 5, 2022 and they are already halfway full. She recommends getting tickets soon because it will sell out.

7. CHAIRMAN'S MATTERS

Mrs. Steinkamp asked if any of the Commission members are getting phone calls about the Three Corners project. Mr. Markir replied that he has been included in conversations with the public. One (1) thing he hears is that it has been almost two (2) years and the public has not been on the site yet. Another concern is about the fact that there will be a four (4) to five (5) star hotel as the destination site rather than a recreational or public community site.

Mrs. Steinkamp said she gets phone calls about this subject and she knows a lot of effort has gone into this plan. However, people are asking her where the recreation is for this site and why are they talking about pushing all of the recreation to the south property. She does her best to pass their questions and concerns to City Council, but she is not sure if the Commission should compile the comments and feedback from the community and pass them to City Council in the form of a recommendation or a more formal manner. Ms. Flanigan stated that it is best if the comments come straight from the source, because at this time the Recreation Commission is no longer giving advice to City Council on this matter. City Council will be discussing the final proposal at their February 1, 2022 meeting. This has all been leading up to a referendum where the voters will have the opportunity to approve or reject how the property will be developed.

Mr. Markir stated that it has been such a long process and it seems to him that if there is more communication with the community by City Council they would have a better chance of having it passed rather than not allowing it to be revisited by the Recreation Commission or other entities.

Ms. Flanigan said that the community is split, with some wanting it done sooner and others want to have more input. In November the voters will have their say on whether this plan goes forward

or not. She would encourage anyone who wants to voice their opinion on the plan to attend the February 1st City Council meeting. If they cannot attend, they can send an email or letter to the City Clerk and request that their comments be read into the minutes.

8. MEMBER'S MATTERS

None

9. NEXT MEETING DATE

A) February 8, 2022

The next meeting of the Recreation Commission is scheduled for February 8, 2022 at 1:30 p.m. in the City Hall, Council Chambers.

10. ADJOURNMENT

Today's meeting adjourned at 3:35 p.m.

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