

MINUTES: DECORAH PARKS AND RECREATION BOARD MEETING
7:00pm, Thursday, July 16, 2020, Whalen Cabin, Phelps Park

Attendance: *Board Chair Rich Gaard called the meeting to order at 7:00pm, Board members Kathy Bakken, Shirley Vermace, Cindy Albers and Brian Fuhrmann were all present. Visitors included Pete Espinosa, Jerri Osenga, Paul Scott and David Bakken. Staff present included Andy Nimrod and Erika Randall.*

Public comment: *Kathy Bakken requested a review of the City's smoking policy and asked for increased signage in the parks. Nimrod said he would consult with Tessa Willie, Tobacco Prevention Coordinator with Helping Services of Northeast Iowa who provided the initial signage for the shelters in the parks.*

Approve minutes: *Vermace motioned to approve the minutes of the June 11, 2020 meeting of the Decorah Parks and Recreation Board, Albers seconded, all approved.*

Review a special events request from Pulpit Rock Brewery to use Wayside Park August 22 for its 5th year anniversary event. *Owner, Pete Espinosa shared some background of his planned anniversary event with the Board, including:*

- *Wants to celebrate being open for five years with a special event for their customers and take special precautions due to COVID-19.*
- *Wants to plan the event accordingly with plenty of room to spread out and help with social distancing by using Wayside Park and 5th Avenue.*
- *Willing to cancel event if COVID-19 numbers begin to rise before the date; he wants to be very careful about putting his own staff at risk as well.*
- *Is working with Art Haus to provide activities for youth and families during the event, and they are also putting together a raffle to win a trip to Norway as part of the celebration.*
- *Shared that the Pulpit Rock Brewery has not had a problem with customers abusing alcohol and doesn't anticipate any problems during this event.*
- *Discussed the special event application and how the area would be controlled so that people wouldn't be able to just walk in from anywhere and what parking might be.*
- *Shared that Pulpit Rock Brewery has been very community minded and supportive of Decorah. He also noted the support Pulpit Rock Brewery has given other local businesses during the pandemic.*

The Board discussed the request at length resulting in a number of comments and questions, including:

- *Would there be a way to support but to not allow alcohol inside the boundaries of the park?*
- *Vermace thanked Espinosa for all he has done for Decorah and thanked him for providing a place that her family felt safe using during the pandemic, but didn't feel the time was right to stage a celebration that would draw people from all over. She offered to volunteer and help if the brewery would wait one year and the pandemic had passed.*
- *Fuhrmann noted that Decorah needed to find ways to have fun and could be supportive, but would like to see a more detailed plan on how things would be addressed including limiting attendance if needed and resolving any parking issues.*
- *Bakken noted that she would not be supportive because she was not in favor of having alcohol in the parks as well as hosting a major gathering during the pandemic.*
- *Albers noted that she would be fine considering alcohol in the park but was not comfortable promoting a celebration gathering at this time, unfortunately just bad timing.*
- *Gaard noted all of the other special events, sporting events and celebrations that have been cancelled make it hard for him to consider allowing this one.*
- *Vermace noted all of the graduations, birthday parties and celebrations of life that have had to cancel or postpone.*

There wasn't a motion to approve the special event request to use Wayside Park for part of the celebration, so a vote wasn't taken. The Board shared with Espinosa that they appreciated his request and attendance, and thanked him for running a great business in Decorah, but because of COVID-19 they couldn't be supportive at this time. Nimrod noted that the ordinance of alcohol in the parks would be discussed further at future Board meetings. Gaard shared concerns that the Park-Rec Board would be overruled by the City Council.

Update from Jerri Osenga regarding the City Prairie and Butterfly Garden: Osenga read a letter to the Board and thanked Jon Geiger from the Parks Dept for all his help on Tuesday mornings. Osenga noted that the original design had an outer path around it and that Jon was working on getting it established. On most Tuesdays there have been 8-12 volunteers helping to take care of the garden. Osenga noted that things are going well but that there was always room to improve, and noted that the "adopt a plant" plan was a way people could help if they couldn't come on Tuesday mornings.

Review request from the Decorah School District to improve the #1 ball diamond grandstands and restrooms: Albers noted that this potential project has been a long time coming and that she was very supportive. Nimrod reported that the Board has been putting off replacing the restrooms behind City Hall for a number of years waiting for this to take fruition. Fuhrmann asked Nimrod and Randall if they had any concerns or suggestions, and voiced his support when they didn't. Gaard thought it would really make things look nice behind City Hall. Albers motioned to approve, Bakken seconded, all approved.

Update of financial reports: Nimrod reported the operation budgets of the parks and campground were fairly stable through the pandemic, and that even the short season of the swimming pool and the offering of a limited amount of recreation programs hadn't disrupted those budgets too much either. Revenues in all of the departments were down significantly except the campground, however it was offset by part time wages being down significantly as well. Part time help is the biggest expense of the operating budgets.

Other: Bakken shared a concern of seeing a park-rec employee not wearing a mask during a morning recreation program. Randall noted that she would review the policy with staff. Gaard noted visiting a new splash pad in Lansing and that he would like to initiate a study or drive to get one established in Decorah. Gaard and Nimrod will meet later to discuss. The Board asked if they could tour the Great Places projects before the next meeting.

The next meeting was set for 7:00pm, August 20, 2020, at Whalen Cabin. Bakken motioned to adjourn, Vermace seconded, all approved.

Respectfully submitted,



Andy Nimrod

Director

Decorah Parks and Recreation Dept