Minutes from February 9, 2012 PRAB Meeting

Absent: Hollis, Coleman

Present: Watson, Pryor, Twarogowski, Ewing, April, Burton, Sharp, Green, Copeland, Carol (aide to Councilperson Charlie Brown), Sandos, Picaso, Pachner, Robinson, Navarro, Smink, Allen

5:34 Darrell Watson, President, called the meeting to order

5:35 The January 2012 meeting minutes were approved

5:35 Public Comment

Maggie Thompson, Bike Denver, had suggestions on rules updates. A couple of suggestions; a speed limit posted should be left open with “unless otherwise specified” verbiage on signs. Prohibition of bicycles within amphitheaters and built structures needs to be addressed, as Civic Center park hosts Bike to Work day. Should this be by special permit? Also, can a parent teach a child to ride a bike on a ball field? Perhaps a 6-ft pet leash limit on trails? A quick look at fee structure for rules infractions; cars get $65 for running a red light, but bicyclists get a $100 ticket?

5:45 Manager’s Report with Lauri Dannemiller

Changes to the new Westwood Park have had an appropriate level of community input. Last meeting had 30+ people, including many children.

Structural task force is to help close the gap between expenditures and revenues. Dave Ettinger now in the mayor’s office is looking at inefficiencies on a department by department basis. An expanded 55-page document on the task force’s findings is available on the website for the public’s perusal.

Between now and March, the department will try to get recommendations on future of mill levies and/or a dedicated funding source. The Denver Public Library has done a lot of research on this topic.

Lauri wants to offer recommendations. Need to look at the following three areas: 1. how do we address expenses of new land (500 acres in the last 5 years)? 2. Looking at gaps in maintenance standards, lifetime of P&R assets. If we had x amount of dollars, we can bring ourselves up to this standard (example: tennis courts). 3. Potential additional youth fitness and health programming. Lauri underscored that they’re not talking about bonds; we’re talking about mill levies. Darrell said that the board had asked in 2010 and 2011 for this plan, and had also asked what help might be available from private donors’ fund (dollars from sponsorships, private donations, etc.).

Jay April: when you say structural gap, why is that different from a regular gap?

Councilperson Nevitt: The things we spend money on (healthcare, fuel, equipment) is rising at a higher rate than inflation. Sales tax won’t keep up, partially because only goods (not services) are taxed. Sources of revenue aren’t growing without adding a single FTE or rec center, and we are forced to cut $30 mil from the budget every year.
April: Is there uncertainty built into the projections (these projections don’t have a range)?

Nevitt: We had many business folks as advisors who agree that this gap is as small as one could possibly expect.

Pryor: You talk about parks separate from rec centers.

Lauri: yes, rec centers are included in another part of the analysis. This is something we have to look at on an ongoing basis. How does the revenue get divided out? The general fund would lose money if parks is its own district.

Pryor: What was the feedback on the new branding?

Lauri: I haven’t defined the branding, that is a job for the new communications manager.

6:15 Update from Erin Brown

Update on POS began in 2011, went fully live in January 3rd, 2012. Requirements not yet met will be fixed. 4,639 memberships sold in January. Complaints have been minimal regarding new fees.

Ski program is going well. Winter Park allocates 2500 lift tickets for disadvantaged youth. This year, they have served 588 students and the program was highlighted on Channel 9 in December. Urban riders (for older students) also doing well. Ski club is a collaboration with eleven nonprofits.

April asked if there’s a program for seniors, and Erin said that she didn’t know but would find out.

Keith Pryor asked what problems we’re having with the new system. Erin said that there are too many steps to process transactions. The system is not recognizing upcharges for neighborhood level charges and the system can’t take multiple credit cards for teams.

Keith: How are we using the data?

Erin: Looking at where wait lists are, using info for grant writing, etc.

Keith added that there is not a choice for class in the new system. Erin: You’re correct, now it’s just “general fitness” but that is a kink being worked out.

Darrell: I look forward to hearing from you and rec centers. Do you have a way to review whether you are meeting your targets? Erin reported that while a system of measurement is not formally in place, she does and will continue to review whether targets are being met. Lauri: When we estimate our projected revenues for the budget, we sort of do this. The Stapleton rec center broke even.

6:25 Councilperson Nevitt reported that the first floor of the Fleming Mansion in Platt Park is open for events. Nevitt introduced Hayden McCreary of the Park People and David Wienhardt of Swallow Hill, who spoke in favor of the proposed alcohol policy at Ruby Hill Park. Weinhardt explained that Swallow Hill brings events to neighborhoods, including the Denver Botanic Gardens in East Denver and at
Chatfield, Pearl Street festivals and Four Mile House Park. They have worked hard on sound control and parking to minimize impact on neighbors.

Jeff Shoemaker, Executive Director of the Greenway Foundation reported that Denver has one of the oldest parks and rec departments, it’s the only one without a dedicated funding resource. It’s time to understand we must raise revenue. The Greenway Foundation puts on free concerts, and they want to expand concerts beyond Confluence Park. The only way they are able to make it work is through the revenues they gain with alcohol sales.

Twarogowski asked Nevitt if any neighborhood groups have expressed concern, and he said “not yet”. Keith Pryor asked what outreach has been done thus far. Lauri said that the process request was made by Nevitt, then they do outreach, and then go to INC, then they have a 45 day wait period before a public hearing. Nevitt reported that he has begun the outreach effort by making some calls.

Nevitt added that Ruby Hill was added as a festival park, but it’s the only festival park with no alcohol allowed.

April: I appreciate your work, it adds great benefits (directed toward the Greenway Foundation). It’s unfortunate that we have to still deal with rules that date back to the time of prohibition.

Keith: Like other parks, will there be a designated space for alcohol within the park? Valerie Kerns: There are natural places within the park where it would make sense, likely staged up at the higher elevations of the park near the pavilion.

Keith added that the designated area might need to be better defined for Excise and Licenses. Picaso agreed that the bowl near the pavilion would be a good place for alcohol sales/concerts, but asked how parking would be addressed. Nevitt replied that for a recent DUG party, the dept. of Public Works made it a solvable problem.

Keith: When we can push people to other parks through the permitting process will allow for more equanimity

Watson: Can you be clear as to what parts of the policy you’d like expanded race/walk, special occasion?

Valerie said that Conor Hollis will contact us regarding the community meeting.

7:00 John Novak, Department of Environmental Health, gave an update on the spill at the Suncor plant in Commerce City. The spill was reported by a fisherman on Nov 27th 2011. Initial response came from the EPA, Tri-County Health Dept, and the State Health Dept. Suncor is under corrective action orders. They have installed a temporary cutoff trench, and they’re doing ongoing sampling of what’s being found in the creek. There are reports of dissolved contaminants getting in the creek 50x higher than drinking level standards, yet “no impact to wildlife” has been reported. Drinking water is contaminated with benzene. Indoor air contamination at Suncor and Wastewater Management Facility, and it may have spread to other nearby properties as well. Suncor is most likely the source of the contamination. Moving forward, they want to further contain the problem with a secondary trench. The material they
produce accumulates on top of the water table, and then it migrates to nearby rivers. Some reached the South Platte, headed northward away from Denver.

Robinson: How is the spill measured?

Novak: Pipelines underground corrode and break. This plant has been located at the site for decades, the might not have ways to adequately measure the loss of solutions.

Paul Burton: Who’s overseeing that facility?

Novak: I don't know who is responsible. Possibly the Colorado Oil and Gas Commission. Samples are being collected downstream. Because this is outside Denver, the city of Denver’s department of Environmental Health isn’t doing any testing.

Paul: How do you feel about what’s going on?

Novak: The state has been remediating Suncor for 15 years!

Paul: Do you feel the oversight is moving in the right direction?

Novak: The state has a black eye.

Watson: Even though it is in Commerce City, is there a catalog of action?

Novak: The City of Denver has a plan in place in case this happens here.

Lauri: Happy to ask for numbers

Darrell: I want data to give curious people

April: Is this making Environmental Health more aware of sites in and around Denver where we are at risk of a similar disaster?

Novak: We keep a catalog of sites being investigated by the State.

7:23 Noel Copeland arrives

Watson: Subcommittee on rules and regulations has met twice. The process has been transparent.

Keith: It has been great to work on this; he’s excited to have a public hearing on a draft so changes can be incorporated. You’re getting a lot more credibility from the community.

Lauri: Happy to do it! Goal is compliance, not penalties.

Keith: I’ve engaged Bike Denver, Bob Finch, and Albus Brooks. Please think about sledding within the parks.
Lauri: I spend 40 hours a week around people with a regulatory bent; it is valuable to hear about these practical concerns.

Paul Burton: The Ruby Hill Railyard closed just before the snow!

Lauri: Bad timing, happy to talk about how it all happened.

Ewing: Will flower beds not be planted along 7th Avenue?

Lauri: Happy to give a lot more detail in the near future. Talk about reducing the number of flower beds came from the maintenance cost, not the cost of initially planting the beds. The department has received a lot of pushback on their plan to reduce the number of beds. The department is looking into the idea of possible interns or volunteers to help with maintenance.

April: would the board be interested in a presentation by the Golf Director?

Darrell: Yes.

7:40 meeting adjourned