

**RECREATION AND PARKS BOARD
OF ST. MARY'S COUNTY**

Meeting of Thursday, August 5, 2004

MINUTES

Board members present: Robert Harper, Chairperson, Coleman Hillman, Vice-Chairperson, Kaki Burruss, Jody Payne, Dorothy Gass, Sam Brown, Robert Richardson, Greg Hambright and Andy Roper.

Recreation, Parks and Community Services staff and others present: Phil Rollins, Director of Recreation, Parks & Community Services (RP&CS); Arthur Shepherd, Recreation Division Manager; and Kathy Bailey, Recorder. Also in attendance were Sandra Patty, Manager, Transmission Program, Power Plant Research Program (PPRP), Department of Natural Resources (DNR), and four hunters interested in the changes in the hunting boundaries at the Elms Property.

CALL TO ORDER

The Board meeting was called to order by Robert Harper, Chairperson, at 5:40 P.M. in Room 14 of the Governmental Center in Leonardtown.

APPROVAL OF MINUTES

Jody Payne motioned, seconded by Sam Brown, to approve the minutes of May 6, 2004 and July 1, 2004. Motion carried 9-0.

RECREATION DIVISION REPORT

Director Phil Rollins introduced Arthur Shepherd, Recreation Division Manager, who provided an update on Recreation Division programs and activities. Mr. Shepherd updated the Board on the following items.

- Most of the Division's summer camps will end this week with the exception of two playground "Sizzler" camps which have two additional weeks.
- The New Horizons camp for children with disabilities ended this week with an appreciation celebration today. Kaki Burruss and Coleman Hillman attended the celebration on behalf of the Board.
- Sports camps have been very popular this summer; a few are still ongoing.
- Three college interns worked with the Division this summer and are working on surveying campers and parents to obtain feedback on the programs.
- The layout for equipment at the Gymnastics Center was redesigned allowing additional room for practice of more advanced routines.
- Amusement park tickets will be on sale through August 27th.
- The Sprayground at Nicolet Park is averaging about 60 attendees per day; shade umbrellas were recently purchased for the facility.
- The Great Mills Swimming Pool has been challenged with recent inclement weather cancellations; the air-supported "bubble" structure will be reinstalled over the pool on September 9th.
- Approximately 2,300 attended the Summerstock Musical, "Honk."

Chairman Harper asked about the status of the Inclusion Committee. Mr. Shepherd stated that he regularly attends Committee on Persons with Disabilities meetings and provides a report on recreation as it relates to persons with disabilities. The Inclusion Committee hasn't been holding regular meetings but issues are being addressed through the Committee on Persons with Disabilities.

He also asked what Division of the Department that hunting falls under. Mr. Rollins stated that would probably be the Parks Division; other than Hunter Safety Courses, the department hasn't promoted hunting as a recreational activity.

ANNUAL REPORT PRESENTATION

Members were asked to review the draft 2003 Calendar Year Annual Report which was previously sent to Board members. Members will discuss the report during the next Board meeting.

ELMS PROPERTY LEASE AREA – HUNTING BOUNDARY

Mr. Rollins introduced Sandra Patty, Manager of Transmission Programs, PPRP, for DNR. Ms. Patty stated that the Elms property was acquired via State statute in 1975 for the specific purpose of constructing a future electric power generating facility. As industry deregulation occurs, these sites become more important to preserve as future sites for power plants. Local governments have the first option for any auxiliary uses of the property prior to a power plant being constructed. The Elms Environmental Committee manages the site for the State of Maryland. The Committee consists of representatives from DNR's Power Plant Research Program, Forest Service and Wildlife Heritage Service; County staff from Land Use and Growth Management and the Department of Recreation, Parks & Community Services; St. Mary's County Public Schools staff; a St. Mary's College representative; and two at-large citizen representatives.

Currently, the Environmental Education Center and Elms Beach Park operate under two separate leases that expired in 2003. The Elms Environmental Committee recommended one long-term County lease that would allow both groups to expand their operations to include new capital investments.

The Elms Management Plan will set the framework to ensure the entire Elms site is used in a coordinated and integrated manner. This plan outlines the management goals for the property which are listed below in order of priority.

- Protect the Elms as a power generation plant site;
- Protect the environment and cultural resources of the Elms;
- Encourage and support use of the Elms for environmental education;
- Encourage and support use of the Elms for recreation; and
- Maintain and manage the entire Elms tract as a single, integrated site.

The Recreation and Parks Advisory Board recommended the draft Elms Management Plan, which included the new lease area boundaries, for adoption on October 3, 2002. The Board of Education and the Planning Commission also recommended adoption of the plan. The Board of County Commissioners (BOCC) approved the Elms

Management Plan in March 2003. Subsequent to adoption of the Management Plan, a new lease agreement was developed between the State and the County and that agreement was signed by the BOCC on April 27, 2004. Staff anticipates that the lease will be presented to the State Board of Public Works for approval in September.

Director Phil Rollins provided copies of the Executive Summary from the Elms Management Plan and the new boundary map. The boundary map shows the new County lease area and the Wildlife Management area.

Under the terms of the new lease agreement, the County's lease area is 476 acres for the Elms Environmental Center and Elms Beach Park. The DNR managed area, which includes hunting, is approximately 543 acres. Ms. Patty noted that the entire County lease area falls within the Critical Area which would be a challenge to develop as a power plant. The new lease area provides additional opportunities for environmental and cultural research and areas for natural and recreational uses. The Committee thought such a compromise was necessary to address safety concerns of having hunting and other educational and recreational uses on the same property.

Brian King, Southern Region Manager, Wildlife and Heritage Service for DNR, could not attend the Board meeting tonight but passed on some information to Mr. Rollins for the meeting. He stated that last fall DNR staff changed the hunting zone prematurely, before the new Elms property lease was developed. After hearing from several hunters, DNR moved the hunting area back to the previous boundaries with the understanding that when the new lease was signed, the boundary would again be move to reflect the new lease area. DNR staff has now moved the boundaries to reflect the new lease area since the lease is expected to be signed within the next few weeks.

Chairman Harper asked how much hunting area has been lost. Mr. Rollins stated that the Wildlife Management area has been reduced from about 790 acres to 543 acres. Mr. Harper stated the Recreation and Parks Board recommended approval of the plan as long as everyone's needs were being met. Mr. Rollins stated that he thought that was the case, especially since Wildlife Management staff served on the committee that developed the master plan and new lease boundaries. Chairman Harper stated that he feels this was a "bait and switch" situation. He understood that DNR staff was to advise and meet with the hunting public as stated during Committee meetings.

Steve Riley, Mechanicsville – Mr. Riley stated that he lives in St. Mary's County and is a member of the military who depends on the County and State to provide areas for public recreational hunting. He's been hunting and fishing at the Elm's Property for the past ten years and has dealt with many regulatory changes over the years for hunting the property. The hunting areas have been reduced significantly over the years. Duck blind hunting is no longer allowed and the northern area has been lost for dove hunting. He was not aware of any unsafe hunting practices going on there. This appears to be a "land grab" where over half the hunting area is being taken away. He feels a hazard is being created with too many hunters in a smaller hunting area.

Bob Porter – Mr. Porter is a hunter safety instructor and hunts at the Elms. He thinks the Elms hunting area is important especially since other hunting areas have disappeared. Hunters that use the Elms are responsible individuals and call ahead, get permits and sign in. He questioned why the area is being reduced.

Ms. Patty stated that the registration system allows a specific number of hunters on the property at one time; that number will not change. She will check the numbers with Brian King, but she did not think the maximum number of hunters has ever been reached for a specific time period. The hunting area has been reduced to expand the opportunities for the Environmental Educational area and Elms Beach Park.

Mr. Rollins stated that there has been some conflict over the years between hunting and the Environmental Education program.

Greg Hambright asked if there are statistics available on hunting usage of the property over the years. Ms. Patty will ask Brian King for those numbers. Mr. Rollins also provided Mr. King's phone number for those who may still have questions. Mr. King previously stated that all the new safety zones have been marked; all other procedures regarding hunting at the Elms still apply; DNR will develop a new parking area behind the salt dome if feasible; and a map of the area has been developed and will be distributed with permits.

Mr. Porter said that previous limits on numbers of hunters were calculated on 800 acres; the same number of hunters on 543 acres may not be safe. He also stated that some of the new lease area for the park is wetland and not suitable for park amenities.

Kaki Burruss stated that in a County where the population is growing that all users are feeling the squeeze for property. In approving this plan, the County has chosen to support DNR in their decision to promote education as the highest priority on the property. She stated that this is going to happen at every park we examine and there is always going to be more than one group wanting the same land and there will be continual trade offs.

Mr. Hambright expressed concern that input from hunters was not gathered in a timely enough manner to be considered before the lease was a "done deal."

Another hunter said that it would be easier for hunters to accept the new boundaries if there were current plans to use the land taken from hunting to expand the Environmental Educational Center or Elms Beach Park in the near future; to say we need more land because we might expand sometime in the next twenty-five years is not acceptable.

LAND PRESERVATION, PARKS AND RECREATION PLAN

Mr. Rollins reminded the Board that the County has begun the process to update the 2000 Land Preservation and Recreation Plan. The Planning Commission, Recreation and Parks Board and the Agricultural Land Preservation Advisory Board hosted a public, kick-off meeting on June 21, 2004, at the Southern Maryland Higher Education Center for the 2005 Land Preservation, Park and Recreation Plan (LPPRP).

Mr. Rollins provided a hand out of the ten most popular park and recreation activities in Southern Maryland households developed by the Maryland Institute for Policy Analysis and Research, University of Maryland Baltimore County. St. Mary's County has a choice of using the statistical information contained in this report or developing its own list of ten most popular park and recreation activities is for the LPPRP.

After discussion, the Board developed the following list of most popular park and recreation activities for the LPPRP. Mr. Hambright noted that fewer than half of the households surveyed had children; because of that, some of the items may need to be weighted more heavily. Mr. Hambright asked if statistics are available regarding number of households with children in St. Mary's County; those may be obtained from the County's Department of Economic and Community Development.

- walking-nature walking/hiking/biking/jogging/running
- attend fairs/festivals and concerts
- swimming in a pool or rivers/lakes
- visiting playgrounds
- picnicking
- fishing from boat or pier
- boating
- field sports
- indoor sports
- hunting
- equestrian activities
- dog activities/dog park

Kaki Burruss motioned, seconded by Andrew Roper, to accept the list of ten most popular park and recreation activities and to add hiking, nature walking, biking, jogging and running (combine with walking); add swimming from rivers and lakes (add to swimming in pool); fishing from boat or pier; add field and indoor sports; hunting; equestrian activities; and dog exercising. Motion carried 9-0.

Mr. Hambright stated that it would be good to have St. Mary's County recreational survey data in the future for other uses.

FY05 CAPITAL PROJECTS

Myrtle Point Park – The County has included funding in the County's FY2005 Capital Improvement Program for master planning for Myrtle Point Park. During the planning process, the BOCC, R&P Board and citizens will consider the types of amenities to be included in the park. Mr. Rollins suggested the Board get some feedback from the BOCC before embarking on the master plan for the park. Chairman Harper stated that might be obtained during the Board's Annual Report Presentation to the BOCC.

The BOCC adopted a Master Plan in the fall of 1998 amidst much public controversy. In March 1999, a new Board of Commissioners rescinded the previous Board's decision and directed staff to have park planners develop a revised concept plan. A presentation by the consultant to the Planning Commission was scheduled for July 1999 but was cancelled when the BOCC decided to put the planning process on hold until they could devote the necessary time to addressing this project.

Mr. Rollins also informed the Board that cost savings may be obtained by using the firm of Rhodeside and Harwell, who developed the previous plan for the park. Chairman Harper expressed concern with offering a sole source contract to a firm that has already formed an opinion on the park program. Mr. Hambright stated the firm may not be

objective enough to provide master planning services for the park. Ms. Burruss stated that if this firm can provide the service at a cost savings because they've already done the research, they should be considered for the sole source. This park program will be discussed further during the next R&P Board meeting.

Charlotte Hall Community Recreation Center Master Plan and Site Program – Mr. Rollins provided a draft scope of work for site analysis and master planning for 40-acre Charlotte Hall/Northern Senior Center property and design and engineering services for the Charlotte Hall Community Recreation Center to the Board for consideration and input. The County has appropriated funding in FY2005 for this project. The Recreation Center will either connect to or be in close proximity to the Senior Center to create the opportunity for shared space between youth, adult and senior programming in a multi-generational center. The master planning process for this project will begin this fall. The Board will discuss the draft during the September Board meeting.

OTHER BUSINESS

REOI For Indoor Recreation Center - The ad for receiving Expressions of Interest proposals from recreation facility developers/operators was recently placed in the Enterprise, Baltimore Sun and the Washington Post. A pre-proposal meeting was held on July 8, 2004 with three firms in attendance; the deadline for submitting proposals is August 20, 2004.

National Recreation Trails Program - Greg Hambright motioned, seconded by Andrew Roper, to authorize Chairman Harper to sign the letter of support for the County's application for funding under the National Recreational Trails Program for Phase II of the Three Notch Trail.

Hiking Trail at John V. Baggett at Laurel Grove – Ms. Burruss stated that group of volunteers has nearly completed the 1 ½ mile nature trail in the wooded area at Baggett Park. Parks Division staff fabricated a trail entrance sign and Bill Burruss made the directional signs. Volunteers included Kaki and Bill Burruss, Sam Brown, Nancy Rogers, Dave Ryan and Tommy Thompson. The trail is called the Three Bridges Trail because the trail includes three wooden bridges. Letters of appreciation will be sent to the volunteers from the BOCC.

Babe Ruth State Championship – Bob Richardson informed the Board that on Tuesday, August 3, 2004 the BOCC presented commendations to the Babe Ruth League, 12 year old division members, who won the State Championship; they have been invited to the National Competition in Aberdeen, Maryland. Also, the Punt, Pass & Kick Competition is planned again this year and will be held on Saturday, September 11, 2004.

Potomac Jazz & Seafood Festival – Coleman Hillman congratulated the Museum Division on the success of the Potomac Jazz & Seafood Festival held on July 10, 2004 at the St. Clement's Island Museum.

SCHEDULING OF NEXT MEETING

The next meeting of the Recreation and Parks Board of St. Mary's County will be held at 5:30 P.M. on Thursday, September 2, 2004 in Room 14 of the Governmental Center in Leonardtown.

ADJOURNMENT

The meeting was adjourned at 7:35 P.M.

Kathy Bailey, Recorder

Minutes approved by the Recreation and Parks board on September 2, 2004.
A tape recording of the meeting is kept on file in the Recreation, Parks & Community Services' office for one year.

cc: Board of County Commissioners
County Administrator