

BENTON COUNTY NATURAL AREAS & PARKS ADVISORY BOARD MEETING
September 14, 2011

Meeting Minutes

Park Board Members: Tom Bucht, Bob Chilton, Phil Hays, Tom Kirch, Randy Rasmussen, Jay Sexton and Ellen Tappon

Staff: Jeff Powers, George McAdams, Mary Simpson

Guests: David Reed, Consultant; Todd Chase, FCS GROUP, Consultant

I. CALL TO ORDER

The meeting was called to order at 7:04 p.m.

II. COMMENTS FROM CITIZENS -- None

III. BUSINESS

A. Review & Approval of July 13, 2011 Advisory Board Meeting Minutes

The July 13, 2011 meeting minutes were approved unanimously.

B. Review & Discussion of August 24, 2011 Parks/Sites' Tour & BBQ

- Jeff indicated that he hoped the tour was beneficial to all – group consensus was very positive. Jeff noted that annual park tours should be planned, particularly for areas of discussion or issues. Phil noted that site tours are a good way to deal with the latest issues and projects. Ellen indicated that it's good for advisory board members to get staff feedback in sites' context.
- Jeff noted that Janine attended the Road & Parks Tour on Sept. 10. Jeff was overseeing the Shrewsbury Renaissance Faire Social Gathering Special Use Permit that weekend, so Al Kitzman shared thoughts and issues about North Albany Park, including potential partnering discussions with City of Albany involving East Thornton Lake Natural Area.

C. Natural Areas and Parks System Comprehensive Plan

- David thanked the advisory board and staff for exceptional review, comments and recommendations throughout the comprehensive planning process. David noted that the financial component addresses funding and governance options that take into consideration tight budget constraints faced by most local government entities. He noted that FCS GROUP presents a well-rounded, progressive idea of what might be possible, with the caveat that there is "no silver bullet." Benton County will need to take the framework to continue discussions with collaborators.
- Todd Chase indicated that Don Ganer, FCS primary with local government funding expertise, sends his regrets. Don has worked with the City of Corvallis, but is dealing with health issues, so can't be directly involved with this project. Todd noted that the FCS approach is pragmatic and realistic, bringing in information and experiences from other parts of Oregon and other states. Challenges arise from trying to find stable funding in an unstable situation. ***Parks utility charges***, mostly through monthly bills, are primarily a city funding source, and can seem more like a tax.
- Benton County needs local funding sources to leverage projects. A challenge comes from funding (county) parks that are located further from folks (unlike city parks). FCS worked off Benton County's projects/estimated costs lists, with the goal of determining how to pay for the proposed projects. Todd noted need to prioritize, within an approximate 20-year timeline, for proposed funding of the \$21 million estimated project costs. He noted that Benton County is relatively small, yet entrepreneurial, so funding

can be complicated or fairly simple, depending on sources. Most growth is within the City of Corvallis (that receives ***Systems Development Charges, or SDC's***), and it helps to have City buy-in if Benton County is looking at potential SDC's. Corvallis and Benton County have large shares of public and non-profit property owners, which makes it more difficult maintain positive fiscal balance.

- Todd noted that Benton County includes many tax exempt land owners, and slow growth in general fund and state shared tax revenue forecasts, such as timber receipts. There are limited dedicated funding options for parks, and county departments have to compete for general fund dollars. Despite these challenges, there are high expectations to maintain and enhance the quality of natural areas, parks and trails.
- ***User fees*** involve high administrative costs, provide relatively little revenue, and tend to make patrons unhappy. ***Local improvement districts (LID's)*** generally involve a zone, with payments from affected property owners, and are generally used for capital improvement projects that benefit numerous large tenants or private property owners. A ***reimbursement district*** involves a local jurisdiction that adopts a zone of benefit (ZBD) and applies a ***special development impact fee*** based on proportional benefit to properties for capital infrastructure; the developer is partially reimbursed as new land use development approvals are granted within the ZBD over a period of time. A voter-approved ***tax levy*** involves the county issuing ***General Obligation (G.O.) bonds*** to finance capital improvement projects, but may not be used for ongoing maintenance. Franchise fees can be used as a supplemental source of general fund revenue that can be dedicated to reserve funds; they are a tax on public utilities that deal with the community. Other potential funding options include: ***Grants, Donations, Partnerships (with agencies and non-profits), and Dedications of land parcels.***
- ***System Development Charges (SDC's)*** are one-time, up-front charges for capital uses only (not to be used for payroll, operating supplies or maintenance). Oregon law (ORS 223.297-314) defines "a uniform framework of" SDC's "to provide equitable funding for orderly growth and development in Oregon's communities." Growth creates demands on public infrastructure and services, and should help offset additional costs. Generally, counties have less development (than cities) so potential revenue would not be as great. However, SDC's could be utilized for: 1) parks and recreation projects, including land acquisition, easements, trails, open space, habitat restoration; 2) transportation, including connectivity through pathways, trails, bicycle and transit facilities and roads; 3) drainage and flood control facilities; and 4) water and wastewater facilities. Todd recommended that SDC revenue be kept in one account, not comingle with other funding.
- SDC's likely have applicability for funding implementation of the Benton County's Prairie Species Habitat Conservation Plan, including habitat acquisition and restoration. Additionally, the proposed 2011 trails plan includes a long-range list of potential capital facilities and land acquisition projects that could be used as a basis for developing a county-wide Parks SDC program. The plan will include about \$4 million in park projects and land acquisition, and about \$19 million trail projects that help enhance mobility and provide recreational functions. Regional trail networks, cooperative projects and setting policies to accommodate future growth/expansion are likely candidates for SDC funding. Tom Kirch added that we need to have maintenance funds once facilities are developed. Ellen emphasized that SDC's would be most beneficial for inter-cooperative trail systems.

- SDC Methodology involves: reimbursement fee (eligible value of unused capacity in existing facilities) and improvement fee (eligible cost of planned capacity increasing facilities), for a total dollar amount per unit of capacity. County needs to set policies to accommodate future growth, which can include expansion of service boundaries. SDC credits against the improvement fee must be provided for the construction of a capital improvement, by being required as a condition of development, identified in a capital facilities plan, and is either off-site or (if on-site) is required to provide more capacity than needed by/for the development.
- The group discussed using area-specific charges, if there are areas in the county that are expected to grow. George proposed that counties with wetland mitigation banks could use them for area-wide benefits. Phil inquired about city and county creating a *saleable mitigation bank*, for transferring SDC credits for areas needing improvements; or transfer or sell credits so someone can build a structure. The group discussed land use issues, and 'no-growth' conditions that the City of Corvallis seems to maintain.
- Governance strategies involving regional thinking and connectivity need consensus building for local support and belief in regional benefits. Outreach must be supported to get a levy on a ballot, for a vote. Todd shared specific improvement programs and regional service districts with dedicated funding sources. Todd gave examples of *Joint Powers Agreement (JPA)* among participating cities, county and/or service districts is likely funded by utility fees; he noted that the "jury is still out" on this strategy. Inter-local agreements among participating cities, county and/or service districts have been successful, and involve more specific joint projects. Todd noted that identified, defined areas are needed, along with a specific plan.
- Strategic Framework for funding and governance includes the following options:
 - Create a "Blue Ribbon Committee" to focus on developing a plan for stable funding. The group noted that this committee needs both city and county representatives, with a regional approach.
 - Establish a "Friends Non-Profit Group" for long-term support. The group noted that the "Blue Ribbon Committee" would likely provide a board of directors for the "Friends" group. Greenbelt Land Trust was cited as a prime example.
 - Identify Non-Funding Strategies and Partnership Opportunities. The group noted this could include collaboration via agreements (IGA's, etc.) and/or transfer of property ownership. It was noted that they need to take full advantage of all strengths brought to the partnership(s).
 - Prepare Financial Analysis of Funding and Governance Options
 - Refine Priorities and Costs with a Phased Implementation Action Plan. This could include prioritizing projects, fine tuning funding strategy, and outreach. Decisions would need to be made about City district, County district, or a larger all-in-one. Ellen noted that eco-tourism involves looking at the big picture of regional economic development. The group discussed whether it's time to have another city-county meeting.
- Phil noted that our outreach meetings in outlying communities showed community interest, particularly in trails and connectivity. The group agreed that we need new champions for our cause(s), particularly for a successful "Friends" group. Phil suggested that we continue to work with City Parks, trade off services, then look at a combined, regional plan that shows both departments advantages. George suggested working with the "Leave No Child Inside" movement. It was noted that the Healthy Kids/Healthy Communities project combines city,

county, OSU and outlying areas. Ellen noted that the Stakeholders' meetings did not indicate interest in expanding with large acquisitions.

- Todd recommended continuing to build on our success, with regional partnering and economic development. David indicated that we should celebrate the new Comprehensive Plan, get the word out, and "sell" its benefits to everyone.
- Jeff noted that the Comprehensive Plan document is at a 90-95% version. Edits should be turned in, and staff will pull everything together for the October meeting.
- Jerry noted that this is great due diligence work!

D. Grants/Projects/Budget Updates

- Jeff reported collaboration for the Salmonberry Campground cabins' approach, including leveraging CIP funds towards a County Opportunity Grant for further enhancements, trails, and providing electricity to some RV sites.

IV. ADJOURNMENT -- The meeting was adjourned at 9:10 p.m.