

Minutes for the second meeting of the City of Austin Parks and Recreation Board (PARB) Baseball Field Working Group

Tuesday October 22, 2024

Present: Lane Becker (PARB board member), Stephanie Bazan (PARB board member), Joel Manzo (Austin Sandlot Baseball), Christa McCarthy (Division Manager, City of Austin Parks and Recreation Department)

Absent: Tyler Sneed (Austin Sandlot Baseball)

The meeting began at 7:03PM CDT, October 22, 2024.

Summary

The meeting focused on drafting a recommendation for an audit of sports fields contracts, reviewing recent work by the city to address access, equity, and maintenance issues in youth sports, and planning future discussions to refine recommendations and integrate community feedback.

Discussion on Agenda and Task Delegation

- Lane Becker proposes an open agenda that can be modified by all participants.
 - Lane Becker will discuss a potential recommendation to put forth at the next PARB meeting.
 - Christa McCarthy will talk about her relevant recent work and potential future tasks.
 - The Working Group will discuss next steps.
- Lane Becker is interested in hearing Christa McCarthy's perspective on what would be most useful from this Working Group for her work as Division Manager at the City of Austin.

Discussion on Putting Forth a Recommendation at the Next Parks Board Meeting

- Lane Becker discusses work he did prior to the meeting with Board Chair Villalobos on the substance of a potential recommendation for an audit of the contracts that support sports fields to present at the PARB meeting happening the following week.
 - The recommendation draft focuses on auditing areas of concern.
 - Christa McCarthy inquires if the audit relates to baseball or soccer. Lane Becker confirms it involves both, focusing on similar issues with their fields.
 - The audit aims to gather additional information that can be used by the Working Group to draft its final recommendation in the coming months.
 - Stephanie Bazan suggests aligning audit questions with previous Council discussions to strengthen the case.

- The Working Group agrees such a recommendation would be beneficial to put forward.

Presentation on Youth Sports Roundtables

- Christa McCarthy highlights the role of Youth Sports Organizations (YSOs) in utilizing parkland for community programs.
 - Christa McCarthy explains disparity in field maintenance due to different resource levels despite similar contractual obligations.
 - Christa highlights the difference between equality and equity in maintaining sports fields.
 - Lane Becker acknowledges that organizations charge varying fees, affecting their ability to maintain fields.
 - Christa McCarthy explains disparity due to volunteer vs. outsourced maintenance.
 - Christia McCarthy provides historical context for why many youth sports organizations have maintenance responsibilities for sports fields.
- Christa McCarthy met with YSO groups to discuss challenges and barriers.
 - Agreements include providing scheduled dates for field use and maintenance requirements.
 - Priority given to scheduled play dates and necessary field maintenance activities.
 - Agreements include providing scheduled dates for field use and maintenance requirements.
 - Hesitation to rent out fields is linked to ongoing field maintenance.
 - Rental fees collected by the athletic office do not support field maintenance, causing financial strain on YSOs.
 - Aging infrastructure is a significant issue, with heavy repair costs that YSO organizations cannot afford.
 - City of Austin sometimes covers repair costs for parkland fields, but struggles to keep up with the demand.
 - Additional barriers include security issues, unauthorized access, vandalism, and homelessness affecting fields.
 - YSO groups face organizational sustainability challenges including fundraising and volunteer recruitment.
- Christa McCarthy brought in Positive Coaching Alliance to hold community engagements.
 - Three roundtables were held, focusing on equity, racial disparities in esports, and operational challenges.
 - Roundtables included youth sports organizations, advocates, and other stakeholders, to evaluate challenges and make informed decisions.
 - New perspectives from diverse attendees were valuable despite inconsistent participation. Discussions allowed representatives to share challenges and thoughts.

- Goal is to make changes to ordinances or policies based on recommendations from the Positive Coaching Alliance.
 - Positive Coaching Alliance conducted a youth sports equity review and will provide recommendations to inform policy changes and will provide new actionable items for future contract amendments.
 - Lane Becker emphasized the importance of harmonizing recommendations from Positive Coaching Alliance with group efforts.
 - Joel Manzo emphasized the importance of Positive Coaching Alliance's perspective from other cities to elevate youth organizations.

Discussion on Issues with Existing Contractual Arrangements

- Joel Manzo emphasized that existing contracts need to be followed, not necessarily changed.
- Lane Becker noted the need to review ordinances preventing adult use of vacant YSO fields.
- Stephanie Bazan highlighted the excitement around progress in equity, emphasizing community feedback as crucial for beneficial outcomes.
- The Working Group agreed the goal is to amend restrictive language in ordinances for better field utilization and to use community input to guide equitable changes in sports field policies, addressing sustainability, security, and other key areas.

Review of Recommendation to Put Forth at the upcoming PARB meeting

- Lane Becker shared a draft resolution to be completed within 24 hours for Monday's meeting.
 - Lane Becker emphasized the need for clear public notice regarding community access to fields.
 - Lane Becker proposed analyzing field availability for community use versus contracted organization activities, including compliance terms addressing contract breaches and penalties.
 - Joel Manzo supported collaboration with the soccer community, noting shared issues and contract compliance.
- Christa McCarthy discussed a pilot contract proposal for shared field use and maintenance.
 - Pilot aims to allow sandlot team play during unused times by sports organizations.
 - Proposal intended to assess feasibility of collaborative field maintenance.
 - Pilot contract proposed for sandlot team to play during unused times and assist with maintenance.
 - Christa McCarthy noted that the pilot contract requires a council fee waiver, which could take 3-6 months.
 - Christa McCarthy highlighted equity concerns due to resource disparities among organizations.

- The Working Group emphasized the need to understand challenges preventing contract compliance.
- Discussion of Huston-Tillotson's new contract, which allows for field rentals, including a reporting structure for rental income and maintenance expenses, which can help offset costs to allow other organizations to use the fields.
 - The Working Group discusses the potential to use this reporting structure as a model for other agreements.
 - Joel Manzo highlighted Huston-Tillotson as a good model and shared feedback from previous experiences working with them.
- The Working Group acknowledged the need for better contract management to avoid future issues.
 - Lane Becker criticized long-term contracts, suggesting shorter contracts with multiple extension points.
 - The Working Group discussed the goal of making recommendations for contract improvements.

Proposal for Next Steps

- The Working Group discussed a plan to discuss Parks board feedback and regarding the new recommendation.
- The Working Group agreed to schedule a second meeting in two weeks to discuss Parks board feedback and board member discussions.

The meeting concluded at 8:00pm CDT, October 22, 2024.