

**City Commission Workshop
Meeting Minutes
April 25, 2018
(APPROVED)**

4/25/2018 - Minutes

1. ROLL CALL

Commission Members Present: Eugene Fultz, Mayor; Robin Gibson, Deputy Mayor; Terrye Howell; Flora "Tonya" Stewart; Curtis Gibson

Staff Present: Kenneth Fields, City Manager; James Slaton, Assistant City Manager; Teresa Allen, Public Services Director; Tina Peak, Library Director; Jennifer Nanek, City Clerk; Stephanie Edwards, Recreation Coordinator

2. DISCUSSION ITEMS

2.1. Discussion - Recreation Priorities

Mr. Fields emphasized that this is a workshop for discussion. There will be no votes tonight. This meeting is to bring the Commission up to speed to where staff is and to get their input as we move forward into budget process. James Slaton, Assistant City Manager, introduced Stephanie Edwards, Recreation Coordinator, who reviewed her activities the past 6 months.

Ms. Edwards said she has developed a master calendar and contact list for various recreation groups. She has been increasing communication with them to learn what they do and what their needs are. She is putting many of the recreation activities on social media to keep the public informed as to what is going on. She has joined local and regional recreation groups such as the Polk Leisure Services Organization and has been learning what other cities do.

Ms. Edwards reported on the movie night at the lake which has been a success and another is planned. She has been working with a Senior group at the Austin center and shows them movies and provide other activities. She is looking to start a Tennis program in fall.

Mr. Slaton, staff did a SWAT analysis of City Recreation. Our Strengths include a supportive staff, City Manager, and Commission. We have a good quality of life and good education here in Lake Wales. We have many volunteers in Lake Wales. Our weaknesses include that fact that we have competing groups and insufficient facilities. We have 2 football programs, several groups need the gym, and 4 baseball groups. Many of these programs don't have the space they really need.

Mr. Slaton said that funding is a problem or a threat. The only revenue for recreation is from general funds which competes with public safety and other needs for these funds.

He said that they are working on a Recreation Master plan. They are trying to get information from the public on what is needed.

Ms. Edwards said that we are gathering input for this plan via social media, website and speaking with various civic groups.

Multi-use Facility - Mr. Fields reviewed the need for a multi-use facility. We need gym space, space for after school programs, larger banquet facilities, a larger emergency shelter. The county does not provide a lot of funding for recreation this side. All facilities used by county residents.

Mayor Fultz says he would like to see a multi-purpose facility but we need public buy-in. We may need a referendum to see if the public wants it. We will need to explain all the details.

Commissioner Stewart asked if we are set on the Hardman Recreation Complex for the multi-use complex. Mr. Fields said no but its a nice location and we own the land. Commissioner Curtis Gibson said the location would be a good recreation hub.

Deputy Mayor Robin Gibson said he would like a needs assessment done before we spend this kind of money. Several groups that need it is not justification enough. We need to understand what revenues would be and people from outside the City must be considered.

Mr. Fields agreed that these things would need to be looked at in detail as we move forward in the process. We will need to look at funding and possible revenues. Mayor Fultz said that this is a need and would enhance the quality of life.

Deputy Mayor Robin Gibson said there are other gyms and we could develop partnerships to help with groups that need the gym before we spend money. Commissioner Howell agreed that the complex is needed. Our gym should be used by our Lake Wales groups. We need to be sure we can maintain the complex. We are moving in the right direction.

Mr. Fields said we need to build a low maintenance building to begin with so that a lot of maintenance isn't needed. We need to be attractive to other families. We need more modern outdoor and indoor facilities. Our recreation is done on a makeshift basis and we need to be better. Commissioner Curtis Gibson said that this has been discussed for 2 years and is glad we are moving forward on this.

Mayor Fultz said this facility needs to be a bigger and better hurricane shelter as people were crammed into Spook Hill Elementary during Hurricane Irma. Deputy Mayor Robin Gibson said he hopes state and/or federal dollars will help with this as many of those using the shelter were from the county. Mr. Fields agreed and said that FEMA will pay for the costs to harden a building to be a shelter and a generator. But the County is responsible for operating shelters so they should help with some of the costs.

1919 School Building/Hardman Hall - James Slaton brought up the 1919 Hardman Hall. He asked the Commission for direction on this. We could move forward with the former plan of becoming a Performing Arts Center which would be costly. We could open it up to the public and see if there is any interest. We could also let it sit for the time being. Mr. Fields said the building wouldn't work well as a Performing Arts Center as there are no dressing rooms or backstage areas. To add them would be costly. Mr. Slaton said that using it as a Performing Arts Center would be difficult as we would need someone to operate it and bring in performances. Commissioner Curtis Gibson said that he sees the vision for this building and a Performing Arts Center is needed but we should at least preserve the building and get rid of the termites.

Deputy Mayor Robin Gibson said we have good facilities already at the Baptist and Catholic Churches. He encouraged adaptive reuse to the building. Mayor Fultz said that as this building is part of the CRA we might discuss this at the next CRA meeting. Commissioner Stewart suggested expanding onto the Community Center as there is land around it. Mr. Fields said that the theaters in Frostproof, Winter Haven and Lakeland struggle financially. This building would not support itself as a performing arts facility. We will have the building assessed to see what the best uses would be.

Commissioner Howell said someone else might have a good idea about that building. We might need to reach out to the community. Commissioner Curtis Gibson said that a lot of government funds were put into this building and we need to preserve it for right now for whatever we come up with later.

Mayor Fultz brought up Commissioner Stewart's idea to expand the Austin Community Center. Teresa Allen said that there isn't that much more space as there are buildings next to it.

Mayor Fultz said we will table the decision on the Hardman Hall.

North Library - James Slaton, Assistant City Manager, reported on the idea and plans to re-purpose an existing structure near the North Fire Station to serve as a satellite City Hall including an express library. This facility might include a playground and basketball court. This project would cost about \$600,000.

Mayor Fultz said that we need to try again to get money from the county to help with this stop. Tina Peak, Library Director, reviewed the progress of this idea. She explained that they currently operate Books by Mail and the Bookmobile with County funds. Lake Ashton is one of the busiest stops for the Bookmobile which indicated to her that there was a need in the North area of the City. She has some funds for furnishings and children's books already. Citizens could also come to this location and pay water bills. Mr. Fields reviewed the new growth coming into that side of the City. This would provide a City presence at that side of the City. City staffing would be minimal. Recreation Impact fees would cover some of the costs.

Deputy Mayor Robin Gibson said that this is a go. Commissioner Stewart said that maybe this would encourage the county to put in sidewalks along Chalet Suzanne Road. Commissioner Curtis Gibson said that this project would reduce traffic coming into downtown. He also said he would like to see the downtown library expanded. Mayor Fultz said that we need more of a drawing card for downtown than the library.

YMCA- Mr. Slaton said that we have an opportunity to get the YMCA property for a fifth of its current estimated value or about \$636,000. If we did this we would partner with the YMCA to have them manage the facility. There is space at the property to expand such as adding football fields. Some additional acreage might be obtained to build more facilities. The facility would need some work if the City took it over. Mr. Slaton said that the details would have to be worked out. Kirk Eich, Director of the YMCA, said that they look forward to partnering with the City on recreation services. This type of arrangement is common throughout the US. They are open to discussing any terms that the City is interested in. He is pro Lake Wales and pro recreation and they want the YMCA to have a presence in Lake Wales. They can still handle the child care and aquatics portions of the programs. There are 150 kids in the child care program. Mr. Slaton said that there will be staffing and maintenance costs with taking over the facility. Mr. Eich said this would be a win for the City, the Y and the community. Mr. Fields said this is a great opportunity for the City. There will be some costs to the City but it will benefit the City. Some details need to be worked out of course.

Deputy Mayor Robin Gibson said he wants to see the contract but some of the samples provided look promising especially the one from Kansas City. It was clearly a partnership and operated on a break even basis. The success of this will depend on good leadership. Commissioner Curtis Gibson said that this is a good opportunity for Lake Wales. We will finally get our pool and we can expand recreation opportunities. Commissioner Stewart said she will be glad for Lake Wales to have a pool. Mayor Fultz agreed that this is a great opportunity and we should seize it. He said some things do need to be worked out yet. It would cost the City more to build a pool.

Crystal Lake Park - Ms. Edwards said they are looking to add equipment and amenities to Crystal Lake Park such as shuffleboard equipment, horseshoes, and other items for families to use to spend the day together.

Gymnasium -Ms. Edwards said that they are looking to take back the gymnasium and possibly expand hours and streamline the process for groups to use the gym.

Mr. Slaton said the costs for these two changes including adding staff would cost about \$100,000 a year. What we pay Boys & Girls Club would offset some of that. He said we would give the Boys & Girls Club a time slot in the gym same as they use it now. Curtis Reddick, Director of the Citrus Boys & Girls Club, said he is fine with continuing the partnership and communication can be improved. He said that anything the Commission does for recreation should be for Lake Wales residents not outside groups.

User Fees - Mr. Slaton said that currently there are no user fees charged to residents for any facilities. Funding for recreation currently comes from the general fund. This includes the gym, ball fields, Soccer complex, or others whereas other cities charge fees. Mr. Fields said that fees are more common in other cities. Scholarships are also available. Most leagues charge participants to play. Staff can explore possibilities of establishing a fair fee structure. Mr. Slaton said that many other groups come and use our facilities because they are free thus displacing residents from using them.

Mayor Fultz said that we should look into fees. If the homestead exemption passes then this revenue stream will help keep other taxes low. Commissioner Gibson asked if we start having fees then will the City oversee the fields? Ms. Allen said we oversee all the fields now. In the past Leagues paid the city \$4 a player and provided a roster of players. Commissioner Gibson agreed that we should look into having fees. Commissioner Stewart said that she would be afraid of kids turned away because they can't pay. This is an important discussion to have. Mr. Fields said that many users are county residents and don't pay anything.

Deputy Mayor Robin Gibson said that our ad valorem taxes aren't that low. They are lower than in the past but higher than other cities. Our residents cannot pay for everyone else to have recreation. Ms. Allen said one of the reasons other Cities can have lower taxes is because there are fees for recreation facilities. Mr. Fields said among the cities without their own utility we are in the middle.

Mr. Slaton asked the Commissioners for a priority list of these projects maybe at the upcoming budget workshop.

3. COMMUNICATIONS AND PETITIONS

Robbie Shields, non-resident, with the Soccer Club said that the Soccer club has many volunteers that contribute to the organization. They also help with upkeep of the field. Other cities that charge fees have more staff available to the community. We need good staff. For most an extra \$4 won't be a big deal but hates to see some kids not be able to pay. He doesn't mind charging adults but hates to make kids pay. Sports are important towards kids' development.

Mr. Shields said he thinks that acquiring the YMCA is a good idea. He said that using the country club or Lake Ashton is very expensive. He recommended exploring more use of the Roosevelt gym.

Andy Oguntola, long time resident, said we need football fields with lines and goals. We need a field to practice properly. His organization is struggling. The kids need to be a priority.

Wanda Howard, resident, said that recreation in Lake Wales in the past has been poor. We need it for our young people to encourage them to come back.

Chris Lutton, resident, charged the Commission to really look at the life cycle cost of all these ideas. He said he agreed with user fees especially for non-residents. He said a city can't run a business and compete with other businesses. He said that residents should get value for their tax dollars. He said that if the Y goes away then the City may be stuck operating their programs. Out of town groups using our facilities need to be charged.

Darryl Washington, PAL, reviewed the history of recreation facilities. Some facilities such as a gym and pool were promised and not delivered. Some sports are outside like football but indoor facilities are needed for basketball. Our young people need places to go including after 10:00 p.m..

Commission Workshop was adjourned at 8:16 p.m.

Mayor/Deputy Mayor

ATTEST:

City Clerk/Deputy City Clerk