



Minutes - Final

Parks and Recreation Committee

Thursday, July 27, 2023

6:30 PM

Council Chambers

2024 Budget Priorities

Roll Call: Chair Gerlach, Affa, Mota

Budget Discussion: Priorities

[15-6100](#)

Parks and Recreation Priorities: Parks and Rec, Trexler, Golf Course, Hamilton Street Dam

Purpose of the meeting is to lay out some priorities; discussions will occur at future meetings.

Clerk reads priorities

PandR Director - 15 minutes

Committee Members - 3 minutes each

Action Items - 3 minutes

Attachments: [Park and Recreation Priorities](#)

[Parks and Rec](#)

[Golf Course](#)

[Hamilton Street Dam Fund](#)

[Trexler](#)

Ms. Mandy Tolino spoke about the trail and facilities for people of all ages and abilities. The three overarching goals that she has is to invest in people, invest in programming, invest in Park infrastructure and capital projects. Those are the three most important things that they are going to focus on next year. They have 60 full-time staff. The Parks and Recreation Department does a lot with a little. She discussed the average amount of staff for Parks and Recreation of nine per 10,000 residents. She suggested to invest in the people that maintain the parks. She talked about the parks and well-maintained trails compared to other cities and acres of parks. She talked about streetscape, snow removal, holiday decorations and Christmas Tree Holiday Decorations and hazardous street tree removal along the right away as a diverse department with a lot of responsibilities. She suggested in investing in an additional crew for a middle shift. This will be from 3:00 PM to 11:00 PM to increase presence and be able to focus on litter cleanup and cleaning and unlocking

restrooms which they know is a challenge. They want all the part-time staff at \$15 an hour and proposing upgrades with the professional staff of two Arborist and Golf Course Mechanic. She would like to add training. She talked about recreational programming and have the Parks Department have a presence in the parks. She discussed programs such as swim lessons and certified playground instructors. CPR Certified Playground Instructors in case there is an emergency during the program. They are doing a Pilot Program for arts, science, music, dance, skateboarding, public arts and anything you can think of. They did six movies and they support aquatics and water safety. She talked about events on a regional level and have Block Party events and the Play Streets Model. She wants to leverage some of the partners on events. She talked about investing in infrastructure. In Golf they want to invest \$250,000 in 2024 for maintenance for bunker repairs. There has been deferred maintenance at the Golf Course. They are proposing bunkers. There are some drainage issues and irrigation. She talked about capital projects that are happening, funded and are moving forward (the Jordan Skatepark, Martin Luther King Trail Design, WPA Structure, Jordan Creek Greenway Trail, Bogart's Bridge, Irving Pool, Valania Park that was recently completed, Cedar Beach Bridges and the Parks Master Plan). The Parks Master Plan is fully funded by DCNR and the city. They are doing an RFP for a Consultant to help us with that Plan. Trails: The Martin Luther King Trail Construction will be a safe route around Martin Luther King Boulevard. There are three grants that they applied for that. They are hopeful they can get started on that in the next two years or so. The city received \$1.3 million for D&L Trail from DCNR in DCED to make that connection of the D&L through the city of Allentown. She went over the capital budget priorities is about \$19 million over the next five years. They were able to leverage grants and Trexler funding and hopefully city commitment as well. The priorities are Fountain Park and focusing on the pool and part of the Parks Master Plan they will get more feedback on the bathroom issues and the whole park plans. What residents want to see, not just the pool area, parking issues, and how to make the restrooms a better parks plan for Fountain. She talked about Block Party Kits. Franklin Park is another park that needs some investment as well as looking at pools at Jordan and Mack. Mack needs some significant repairs. It is an aging infrastructure. The Parks department is putting some money into it this year. It needs a significant investment to remain open. The Percy Ruhe Master Plan, there is a Plan for that and figuring out what phases they would like to tackle. A mini pitched soccer field with concrete for urban downtowns. It has the ability to bring soccer to a place where there is not a lot of grass. It is really cool to see in the denser areas of the city. Upgrading the pavilions and a maintenance facility for parks. Many of the maintenance staff are in the Watershed Barn. It is a beautiful barn, but it is not meant to house 50 men and women working there. It is not set up for ADA compliance and it does

not allow for facilities for both men and women. she would like to continue to strengthen their partnerships with Trexler Trust. She wants a collaboration between Parks and Public Works to address some of our street tree needs in the city and figure out the best way forward where the Tree Inspector makes the most sense living. Parks is very well versed on all things trees.

Ms. Ce Ce Gerlach thanked Ms. Tolino and stated that is a lot. She is excited to hear about a couple of things. Of course, increasing the wages for all employees. She stated that \$15 is a living wage. It is hard to pay bills even with \$15 and the investment in people and the planning in the parks and making sure it is more equitable. She asked about the last budget and Park Rangers that are unarmed that can write citation.

Ms. Mandy Tolino stated that they have seasonal Rangers and their role is mostly opening bathrooms, blowing off the basketball courts and being a presence in the parks. They are not able to write citations. She does not like the Parks Department being an enforcement agency.

Mayor Matt Tuerk stated that if they build an enforcement arm of the Parks Department there is a lot of startup costs associated with that and training that would be required to give those folks the capacity to be enforcement officials. What we ask a Park Ranger to do presently requires a certain amount of pay. We are asking people to be enforcement entities and would require a significantly higher rate of pay. The city Sanitarian doing enforcement, Code Enforcement folks, Police Department, and Sweep Department. To add that to the Parks Department may have significant costs. They are willing to explore it with Council. It is certainly interesting. They are cognizant of the challenges that are presented and getting people to comply with the regulations that are in place. Perhaps having maintenance crews in the parks from 3:00 PM to 11:00 PM.

Ms. Ce Ce Gerlach stated when she saw Maintenance crews working from 3:00 PM to 11:00, that is the first thing she thought of. It could eventually lead to something like that to see how it works. If you a member of maintenance and dealing with the issue right in front of you and you have an issue, who do you call, but the police.

Ms. Mandy Tolino stated that is a good suggestion to see what it would look like for full-time staff and what is the cost benefit.

Ms. Ce Ce Gerlach stated with the Block Parties, way back in the day in 2012, it was really easy to do a Block Party. She did one as a resident and got some signatures and paid \$25 bucks and she did a Block Party on Walnut Street. It is not like that anymore. How can we change that and do

we want to change that?

Ms. Many Tolino stated that she may not be the best person to go into the nitty gritty details. Ryan was involved in the Bloomberg/Harvard study that they focused on to make the process easier. You still have to get the signatures and not go through the lengthy process.

Mayor Matt Tuerk stated that is one of the favorite things they did this year. They identified an innovation team through this Bloomberg, John Hopkins Civic Engagement effort. They interviewed people across the city and find out what the greatest needs were and what they can do things better. One of the things that came back was the strong citizen interests is developing this Block Party in a Box. Ryan worked with a team of 12 folks from various different departments just to understand all the components required to make that happen. The Race Street Block Party is this Saturday. They were the inspiration for Block Party in a Box. Ryan did a fantastic job working across the city with the innovation team.

Ms. Ce Ce Gerlach stated that she would definitely be interested in that, especially the Block Party.

Ms. Candida Affa stated that the staff shifting from 3:00 PM to 11:00 PM is a great idea. It could go to day shift from January to March. She gets from a lot of people, why can't our parks be cleaner. She stated that as Ms. Gerlach said about the Rangers. She would not want to be a Ranger. She knows what the Parking Authority goes through when they give a citation. Could you imagine if someone is drinking in the park, and you give them a citation. It could be a little dangerous. She constantly defends that the parks are so clean. It takes a couple of days. It is a lot of out of towners is what the problem is. She asked about the Jordan Park Pool and is it going to be opened.

Ms. Mandy Tolino stated that it needs significant investment and there is no funding currently to do that to make the investment to fix the pools.

Ms. Candida Affa stated that she is not for the city opening another pool. She would like to them maintain the ones that they have. If the city can get Irving and Mack opened up that would be sufficient.

Ms. Mandy Tolino stated that the priority is Mack because it is open, used and needs repair. That will be first priority.

Ms. Candida Affa asked if the city will have Lights in the Parkway this year.

Ms. Mandy Tolino stated that they will have Lights in the Parks this year.

Mr. Daryl Hendricks asked about the Rangers and what he is seeing is swimming taking place in some of the creeks. That is something that a Ranger would be able to and not being overly burdensome, speak to the people and advise them of the rules that they cannot be swimming in there. He does not want to see someone drowning.

Ms. Ce Ce Gerlach asked if there were any other questions.

Mayor Matt Tuerk stated that he has a concluding statement based on all the past couple of days. He thanked Council for hosting these meetings. It is incredibly helpful to the administration to give Council an early look at how things are going to 2023 and give a sense of what our priorities are in 2024. Broadly speaking you heard everyone talk about staffing. They are in the business of providing government services and services are a labor-intensive industry. Whether it is our police that are wildly understaffed or the data on the Parks Department that should be two times as big as it is right now. The city needs to make investments in people. Whether hiring people or making sure their wages are realistic for 2023. It is something that the administration committed to do in the 2023 budget. They talked about it being a people centric budget. He stated that 2024 will also be a people centric budget. It is other things that they heard. He talked about ESRI and departments making investments in data. He is encouraged by the team's adoption of a Geospatial strategy in how we deliver city services. He stated that Vicky mentioned a lot around clearing the clutter and asking that why question a lot. The why question is asked on all the things that we do. Why should we continue to do the things that we always done or the same way they always done them if the city has changed so dramatically. One thing he and Ms. Affa go back and forth on is the idea of out with the old and in with the new. We don't want to sweep out all that is old. They still want to do Lights in the Parkway. They want to do things that is consistent with today's city. The Parks Master Plan was driven by the needs of Allentown's current residents and future residents. It is a very smart and innovative approach. He hopes Council makes smart investments in the delivery services to our residents and stakeholders based on those important criterions. It does come back to the people. They are hoping to build respect, of support for professional development, of caring for our employees as human beings and fundamentally and most importantly perhaps a culture of inclusivity and welcoming. There is a lot of work to do in the city of Allentown. It would be great to go into December with a complete budget.

Adjournment