

**URBANA PARK DISTRICT BOARD OF COMMISSIONERS
MINUTES - BOARD STUDY SESSION
WEDNESDAY, FEBRUARY 23, 2011
6:00 – 7:30 PM
ANITA PURVES NATURE CENTER
1505 N. BROADWAY
URBANA, ILLINOIS 61801**

A board study session of the Urbana Park District Board of Commissioners was held Wednesday, February 23, 2011 at the Anita Purves Nature Center, 1505 N. Broadway, Urbana, IL at 6:00 p.m. The notice and agenda of the meeting were posted at the park district administrative office and at the location of the meeting. Copies of the notice and agenda were received by each commissioner of the district and by local newspapers, radio, and television stations at least forty-eight hours before the meeting in compliance with the Open Meetings Act of the State of Illinois. A copy of the notice and agenda is attached to the minutes.

COMMISSIONERS	PRESENT	ABSENT
President Michael Walker	X	
Vice-President Nancy Delcomyn	X	
Commissioner Deborah Rugg	X	
Commissioner Bob Stewart	X	
Commissioner Meredith Blumthal	X	

Also present were Vicki Mayes, Executive Director, who arrived after the meeting started; Dana Mancuso, Public Information Manager, who arrived after the meeting started; Tammy Ebert served as Recording Secretary.

- I. Call to Order
President Walker called the meeting to order at 6:06 pm.
- II. Audience Participation
No members of the public were present.
- III. Discussion
 - A. Discussion of Pool Referendum Information and Process
There was no discussion of the pool referendum information and process.
 - B. Discussion Regarding Follow-up from the 2010 Board Self-Evaluation
 - C. Discussion of 2011-2012 FY Goals

President Walker asked the commissioners who attended the state conference and especially Beth Michaels' presentation for their comments. Commissioners Blumthal, Rugg and Stewart attended the conference.

Commissioner Blumthal talked about the sessions by Beth Michaels. She noted it was nice to see other boards are struggling with the same issues UPD is. She stated there was a focus on clarification of roles and good discussion about the "Balcony" vs. "Dance Floor" views. She

remembered in particular from the presentation that "you are only the Board when you are at the table". For her, the most educating were the testimonials, such as the value of planning calendars and other items UPD's board has not started or implemented yet.

Commissioner Rugg also attended these sessions. She said it was the first time she had thought about board jobs. Every member should have a job just as every member comes with their own strengths and she hoped this board could think about what it should ask each member to do. She emphasized that the board is only a board when it is all together at the table; when it is acting as a board. As a board, if we wanted to be more aggressive we might ask Michael, as our spokesperson, either at meetings or elsewhere to do certain things. We might accept that there ought to be assignments at the end of the meetings. Right now most of our information comes to us because Vicki and the staff generate it. She said she has talked to Vicki and Beth Michaels about what the significant role of the board is. She knows there are certain things the board has to vote on such as referendums. But the commissioners are not park professionals.

Commissioner Blumthal said that Beth Michaels put a real emphasis on the importance of strategic planning. Ms. Blumthal said that she saw the role of the board in strategic planning, the balcony view. That resonated with her because we have right in front of us this referendum, but what do we have 5 years out from now. This is sort of pivotal in terms of what we do going forward.

President Walker said that the district is at a fork in the road. Blumthal agreed and asked what direction do we as a board want to see the UPD move in and what are our goals and objectives? The board should take a very active role in the development of the strategic plan.

There was a brief discussion regarding the differences in the way the Champaign and Urbana Park Districts operated.

Commissioner Delcomyn asked if the board is trying to fix something that is not broken. President Walker stated he doesn't feel that the board is doing a poor job. He does feel there are things that need to be done better such as doing a proper evaluation of the director and making sure there is something on paper of what the goals are for the coming year. The board has not been consistent in doing that.

Commissioner Rugg stated she agreed with President Walker. In reference to the goals for the director in the past, she was sure that the Board had really agreed on them. She stated that she believes one of the things the board needs to feel more comfortable with is being more assertive in coming to a point where we all clearly agree and know what we agree to, that it is firm. The only time we can have these discussions is at a board meeting and there are a lot of things we need to do at the meetings. She continued saying that when we do our board evaluation we should look at everything such as what do we need to do from 7 PM to 9:30 PM. What of that that we normally do really needs doing? She knows we need to be approving a bunch of stuff. She knows we need citizen input. The advisory committee is helping with various things, but they are not advising the board. Rugg is concerned that we can finish with the distinguished agency accreditation in a year. The process is now changing from distinguished agency; appropriately, to accreditation according to a session she attended at the state conference.

Commissioner Stewart noted that many of the concerns other boards have, are not ones this board deals with. We don't have a president who behaves like a dictator or members conspiring with each other regarding different issues. One of the handouts from Michaels' session is an evaluation of each board meeting. At the end of each meeting the members evaluate how the meeting went. If we did that, we could talk about it: did we waste too much time talking about this issue or that issue, etc. That way later on we can get together to see how that works and if we are in agreement that that is a problem or not.

Commissioner Blumthal said the board has already implemented the structural changes such as we talked about the agenda and how we can move things around to expedite it. Seems like we were very much on the right path with the changes we just implemented. One thing she remembered was that we had a question about how we use staff. Often she really doesn't know what she needs from the staff and they don't know what we need so they are guessing. Blumthal thinks there is a lot of time and effort being wasted on trying to read each other's minds. We should ask what more information we need to make this decision. She feels like once we start thinking bigger and thinking as a part of the strategic plan it will be more direct. We can use simple phrases like to the staff such as show me the options and the numbers for each option. When we can do that we get information that we need and can use.

Commissioner Rugg said that along that same line, we have long presentations from the staff. When she asked the director about this, she said that's because staff doesn't really know what the board wants and so staff may present more than is needed. Rugg stated that it is hard to figure out what is in the strategic plan and where it is. Then it is hard to tell people what we are working on and where UPD is going. Blumthal commented it is like the Bible for the staff. The budget and the strategic plan are what they constantly go back to. It doesn't seem the board has a role in this, we just approve things.

President Walker said the board does play a role in the budget and the strategic plan. Except the strategic plan is not something the board has not been reviewing every year. He would like to revisit the strategic plan with the new census data, for example. He stated in his opinion, the district has not really looked as comprehensively at the programming and recreation side of things the same way we have looked at operational side.

Commissioner Rugg asked how does the board sorts out its role? She asked this of those who have been on the board longest. She said the board chose Vicki and at some point we are going to have to worry about getting another Executive Director. And as a board we need to push on things that we don't see happening that should be. If we believe there needs to be more marketing or more development and volunteer coordination or working with the Foundation or UPDAC. How do we look at this so we can be helpful? How do we get effective communication out and she referred to the installation of air conditioning at Phillips for an example. What is our role in the budget planning without doing micromanagement?

Director Mayes entered the meeting.

Director Mayes responded that the board's role in budget planning is important. The board must be looking toward the future and the broader policies that get the district where they want it to be. So if part of that is increasing the focus of any area like development or

marketing, then an effective way would be for the board to say to the director, this the result we want to see. How does staff do recommend we get there. Commissioner Rugg commented that the board does not have a way to ask things and the director does not have a way to hear from the board that we would like to see the district go in a particular direction. For example, if the board would like to promote a comprehensive health and wellness program, which goes back to our strategic plan and it is one of the core service areas we've identified, how would we say that. If the board said, we'd like to build a bowling alley, the director would then ask, show me where that fits into our strategic plan.

President Walker said it is also the board's role when we see the budget to say, why are we still doing x or y. Where are we looking for new opportunities and if we start talking about them, next how do we fund it, do we reallocate or go find additional money? These are the kind of things that are board-level things. We should not be looking at every line item in the budget. Walker said that this came up, for him, when the director had just put out a list of things for the coming fiscal year. He said he noted that there was not a review of the census data as it applies to the strategic plan or to the recreation programs. He expressed his concern that the district needs to find the resources to at least do some review of this because the demographics of Urbana are changing.

Commissioner Stewart stated that the semi-annual self-evaluation is where the board talks about this type of thing. Stewart said one of the things he has thought through his years working in social services is boards hire a director to do what they need done at that moment. The director does that and then there is always a need to shift and refocus. So going along with Michael's comment, he said that now that we have a new maintenance building, is it time to shift our focus on programming. Commissioner Delcomyn agreed.

Commissioner Rugg said that it is really good to have a couple of sessions on that topic because the first time the board meets and get our minds around it, we will develop new questions. In thinking about what Nancy said about where we are starting from, a board or organization doesn't need to be bad to improve, the corporate model is continuous improvement. When you sit down and start thinking of little things then you can always think of what you can change or what you can do. Meredith talked about what kind of standards we have. And Meredith noted that we've got a branch depending on what happens with the referendum. Per Commissioner Rugg, if we don't build a pool, it isn't going to stop things; we still have a ton of things to do. We'll have to use some of our current money to dig the old pool up and cover it over. But we are going to continue. Rugg said that to her; when you have an evaluation you have a standards then you evaluate how close you've come to the standard. We have one of the expectations for the director's goals for succession planning. Is there something against which we can judge? Can we say we have done anything toward this, is there anything that needs to be done next, do we need to allocate any money to it, training to it? Director Mayes agreed. She said that it is important to determine if the board wants to be bringing along someone to be a future director or does the board want to involve bringing a whole staff as a group to a certain point? Both of those are both really good to determine. Commissioner Rugg noted that the district has just had three internal promotions. That's good. Mayes noted that in all areas we have a lot of depth. She said that we don't have people exactly where they need to be and that staff is working on those internal issues right now. We do have depth and a lot of strong people. She noted that what is also exciting with the new opening at the nature center; a new talented person has come into the system. The same thing is happening in facilities maintenance.

Commissioner Stewart brought up another item from the session at the state conference regarding the importance of having a board manual. If we had something like that it would make bringing in a new board member that much easier. Or if we have a member who is doing something harmful to the board or district, then there is something that says look this is our policy, rather than saying we don't like what you are doing. We don't have the ability to do that that right now. Other commissioners agreed. Stewart gave an example relating to does UPD allow voting by telephone during a meeting. In a discussion at the conference, some of us remembered we did, some of us remembered we did not or did not make a decision. President Walker reinforced that if it isn't written in a in a board manual we can't say – look here.

Director Mayes noted that once Caty Roland becomes comfortable in her new responsibilities, Leona Duddleston will be dedicated to putting together the information for the distinguished agency accreditation. Even if she does not complete it before she retires, it will still be possible to bring her back as a temporary, part time employee to finish it. A Board Manual is a mandatory requirement for accreditation. So far Donna and Betsy have been pulling together all the resolutions and ordinances that have been passed since 1989 and putting them in binders.

Director Mayes stated that she believes completing the requirements for distinguished agency accreditation can be done in a year. She said for most of it is a matter of collecting things that are already done and refreshing them. To maintain accreditation, there are things that must be done every three, four and five years. The first step is just collecting them all together.

Commissioner Rugg asked about the time-line and budget. She noted that when we file the application, we have a time limit to finish the process. She thinks there is a six-week time period each year when applications can be submitted, it may be longer. Mayes concurred. Mayes noted that staff want to know that the process can be completed within the time limit before the application is filed. Once the application is filed, then we will be assigned a mentor who will work with us for the year. Leona has all of the requirements collected and we have outlined the gaps that we need to fill. Mayes noted it was not an expensive process but it is time intensive for staff and board. She suggested that we can have Al Griggs come and talk to us about this. Champaign Park District is going through their third recertification and Al has been a mentor for many many years.

Director Mayes suggested that at this point in time we don't know what initiatives the board would like to consider in refreshing the strategic plan. For example, do we want to look at the census data and then try and determine if we are applying it the right away. She suggested that we budget an amount for some sort of strategic board process for the 2011-2012 FY budget. She encouraged the board to begin working toward determining initiatives for the 2012-2013 FY budget. Commissioner Rugg asked if there is an initiative or something the board wants to do can the board ask is there enough staff to do this? Mayes said yes, absolutely, the board can ask if we are staffed and have the resources to do what requested. If there is a crisis during the year, then it is necessary to review and revise priorities. She noted that it is really difficult to have the board say we want to see this done when there aren't enough resources and we still have to keep doing everything we planned to do. Mayes said that this is the right time to beginning to working 2012-2013 FY initiatives. That puts will put us right into the point in time in the fall when staff start thinking about what are we going to do in 2012-2013. Maybe one of

the things you want to do is take a look at the changing demographics and apply those. There was some discussion of how the census data apply to strategic plan. There was also discussion about determining how the district has changed and where we should expand in the future and who we should be serving. Do we need a map that says this is where we have grown; this is how we have changed? This is not about fine tuning how we evaluate ourselves when we talk about where the park district should provide services. How do we get to those questions? Those are answers that will be essential for her to figure out. What kinds of questions do we need to be asking and what kind of data we need?

Commissioner Rugg said that she liked what Bob mentioned about filling out a meeting evaluation at the end of each board meeting. Was it productive? Do we need more of something or less of something? Could I have been more productive in this meeting? It is like working on the 2012-13 budget as a specific project. What kind of board skills do we need for that? What don't we have? What can we improve? Do we need more training? It is like with the distinguished agency you say, it would be nice to have Al come, Because Al is an expert he can do it pretty quickly. We can take a half hour with him and learn a lot.

Director Mayes said in relation to refreshing the strategic plan that one of the things that would be excellent for the board to be able to do is to define what it wants to see accomplished at the end of that refresher. Do you want to look at demographics? Do you want to apply demographics to what we are doing in recreation programs? Do you want a benchmark of where we are in terms of our operational improvements for playgrounds and facilities? Does that help you give yourselves a benchmark? Then taking that and saying to Beth Michaels these are the things we want to begin working on in the next three years. Work with us to identify those kind of resources, skills, money, training that the board needs in order to understand how to get to that point. I think we are the ones that need to tell Beth where we want to go.

There was discussion about whether Beth Michael was the most appropriate for a strategic plan refresher or someone else, especially someone who is a parks and recreation professional. Mayes suggested that the board should tell the staff what the board wants to accomplish and then staff and consultants sit down and figure out how we get there. There was discussion about the amount of talent on the board and how the board can function better with its collective talent and experience. It was emphasized in the discussion that this is not needed because the board is not good but because it can be better. It can end up with a process for planning or for guiding a budget. There was also discussion about the value the board would get by having a consultant work with the board on board organization. Mayes asked the board to consider if discussion about improving board processes needed to be facilitated or does the board know it has developed the capacity to do it without facilitation. She observed that the board has been struggling with this same question for many years and so it maybe that an outside person can facilitate that process. A facilitator can help us get to the point that we can say, we have developed this process, this is where we are going, we know what things that we want to work on. President Walker said that he could see the value of somebody like Beth Michaels coming in to help us get into a consistent cycle. He was not certain that she would be able to help with looking at census data and recreation programs. Commissioner Blumthal said she sees someone in a facilitator role would help guide those probing questions. Commissioner Rugg said the question is the kinds of things we appropriately ask. For example when we look at the census data, we say we think we need to be serving this population, are we? She said she thinks the goal should be to define how we do a process and how can we most efficiently ask

staff to get the data that the board needs. She continued by saying we need to have a processes that gives clear directions to staff. Often at the end of the meeting we have a situation so that we five board members go home thinking the next meeting we are going to do X. That isn't what happens because the director hasn't heard a consensus or a clear direction from the board on what it wants.

There was discussion about when information is presented to the board if an individual board member asks for something or if the board, as a majority, asks for something. Commissioner Stewart gave an example with the storage problem and building a new storage building. The board was struggling with building a new building for a storage space. Then Tim realized what we were struggling with as a board and the next meeting staff came back with this study and report that they had done in determining a need. It had all the different photos of all the different places that we had stored stuff all over the district. A lot of times I think staff may hear one of us say something and they think that is something staff should address. But, it wasn't the board that said it; it was an individual member that said they wanted more information. So if the board gives the direction, staff can come forward at the next board meeting with the stuff that's going to help all of us make a decision.

After more discussion Commissioner Delcomyn noted that there is an opportunity for us to be better and so the board needs to train ourselves; it is a matter of training ourselves. Spending five minutes saying, what are the things we talked about tonight, is there anything here we want or need more information on? Is there something we would like the staff to present to us and to give them a chance for them to hear us speaking as a single voice? Mayes noted that on study session agendas there is an item "Direction to Staff" but it is not on the regular board meeting agenda because that is a decision making meeting. At a regular board meeting, the board can talk about something that is not on the agenda and give direction to staff. The Board can't make a decision on it. Commissioner Rugg said that it seems as though when we are at a board meeting and new issues come up that it would be nice at the end of the meeting to say "what kind of things did we, the board, say we wanted?" Then we decide as a board, these are the things we really want to know. Director Mayes noted that would give fantastic direction to the staff. It makes the staff's job easier because then the board has told us some of the things that will help it consider the issue instead of guessing what will be helpful or whether you as a board actually need it. That gives really good direction and it will make us a much higher functioning team.

Commissioner Delcomyn said that is a responsibility the board has to take on ourselves, as a board we have to start paying more attention to that. Director Mayes noted that this is where she believes Beth Michaels can help. She can facilitate those kinds of board procedures. In addition to have expertise in strategic planning, Michaels' skill is as a member of a board that turned itself into a highly functioning board. It was a board that went from being a darn good board to one that was a highly functioning board. Mayes recommended going to the school website where Ms. Michael's serves on the board. She said it this school district is able to articulate where they are in their strategic plan in a way that is powerful. Her experiences as a participant on another board is that she helped develop a process so that board got to a dramatically high functioning level. Commissioner Stewart described how he looks at her as a sociologist. She leads to the group to decide what they want to do then she helps figure out the process to get there. She helps us with the whole process so we are working together to get it done. He noted that if it was easy to do we would have been doing this ten years ago. Stewart

said that Michaels' facilitation would be getting us talking about what we want to do, what we tried before, why it didn't work, suggesting different ways. I believe that is what she brings.

President Walker said that in fairness, the board has talked about doing some things that haven't really gotten into a regular cycle yet. We talked about having a calendar laid out and we haven't got one that has had all the problems ironed out. Commissioner Rugg stated that we have said we would work toward some things that we haven't done. She gave the example that she and Nancy volunteered for something that is not done yet. Rugg said she thinks that having the goal of having a high functioning board is a good one. We are a good board, a very good board. But it is a telling fact that we probably have a list of ten things we said we were going to do that would make us a little bit better and for whatever reason we haven't done them. In the last few years we've done master plans, we've done a strategic plan, we've done a planning and operations building, we've done a pool. Now we are going to have another 150 years of the park district, what is it that we need to be doing next? We need to say that with a kind of sharpness that says what is it that the citizens of Urbana, through us, think we ought to be doing? How do we think about who should be the next director, do we have other things we would like if we think about getting people groomed to be park commissioners, what is it we want the UPDAC committee doing next? Is everything they want to do ok? Commissioner Delcomyn suggested that the board think about this between now and the next meeting.

IV. Adjourn to Executive Session
No Executive Session was held.

V. Adjourn

President Walker adjourned the meeting at 7:45 PM.

Michael Walker, President

Betsy Wong, Secretary