Urbana Park District Advisory Committee

Minutes

October 25, 2011

Members present:
Deb Aronson; Gary Bernstein; Carl Larson; Bob Mandra; Bev Rauchfuss; Martin Srajek; Christy Uden

Park commissioners present:
Nancy Delcomyn

Staff present:
Tim Bartlett
Ellen Kirsanoff
Dana Mancuso

The meeting was called to order by Carl Larson, UPDAC chair, at 7:10 pm.

The minutes from the September meeting were reviewed and approved.

Reports:
UPDAC Chair: Carl Larson reported that the trails committee met this evening prior to the UPDAC meeting. The committee learned from Tim Bartlett about UPD's efforts both on the local and state level regarding trails, including bike trails. Carl hopes to organize the signage committee to meet with Dana shortly. He urged UPDAC members to join one of those subcommittees if they are interested.

UPD Staff: Tim Bartlett reported that:

1. October 28 the UPD is hosting the Halloween Funfest 6-9 at Marketplace Mall near Sears. That event is hosted jointly with the Champaign Park District. The haunted house is the centerpiece of the event.
2. At 10 a.m. on November 19 there will be a dedication ceremony for the Gateway Trail into Busey Woods. Landscaping and interpretive elements around Anita Purves still need to be completed and will probably be finished by spring.
3. The operations and maintenance building construction is winding down. Staff may be able to move in by late November or December. There will be a dedication in the spring with an open house.
4. The staff reviewed and updated the safety policy that will ensure better safety for workers.
5. Meadowbrook Barn landscaping and interpretive elements will be finished by next spring.
6. The pool planning and design continues to be refined. Staff plans another open house shortly.

7. 2012 capital budget has been drafted, as well as a five-year capital plan.
8. Office space needs analysis has been undertaken with a focus on the Cottage. It is especially cramped. One possibility is to use 901 N. Broadway for a short-term fix.
9. The Board approved funds for an analysis of the Carle Park Pavilion.
10. The King Park trail is almost complete. King School teachers are very excited about having that resource for their students.
11. Ellen Kirsanoff announced that the November meeting will be held the fourth Tuesday, which is two days before Thanksgiving. There had been discussion of moving it but it was decided not to do so.

Commissioner Report:
Nancy Delcomyn reported that the commissioners looked at the budget for AV and IT for the new O&M building. The plan is to use that space for meetings as well so it is important to have those features in place.

New Business
Youth Scholarship Fund
UPD staff provided information regarding youth scholarships. Scholarships have been offered at least since 1982 and probably far longer. Some information was passed out regarding the number of requests, the number of scholarships offered and the number of scholarships used.

Staff concerns included:

- Communication
- Policies
- Multiple funding sources
- Finding more funding sources
- How funds are administered
- Barriers to applying, including perhaps pride and paperwork.

Communication: Staff would like to investigate whether they are getting the word out well enough, especially to people for whom English is a second language. Dana mentioned that the UPD ran audio bus ads — a first — and included information about scholarships on those ads. There was discussion of providing some of the information in Spanish or other languages. Information on scholarships also has been and will be again included in the UPD newsletter that goes home with all students in the school district.

It was noted that, if approximately 55% of students in Urbana get free or reduced lunches, shouldn't we see roughly that percentage of UPD participants requesting scholarships? The answer appears to be "no," but more data would be needed to confirm that and to understand the population better.

Christy also made the observation that everyone needs to eat (which explain lots of applicants for lunch), but not everyone needs to participate in recreation programs in the same way, so perhaps the percent of students receiving free and reduced lunch is not a reasonable benchmark.

Policies: Staff looked for input regarding whether scholarship funds should be made available only to Urbana residents. The general feeling from UPDAC was, no. That the scholarships, except where dictated by funding sources (see below) should be made available to anyone. The question also was raised whether funds should be made available also to adults. It has been done on occasion in the past. No one felt strongly against that, but it was noted that UPDAC did not have enough information to say for sure. They needed to know how many people in the past had applied who did not live in Urbana and how many adults, likewise, had requested scholarships. If these are not big numbers they don't appear to present a problem. If they are big numbers then perhaps a more formal policy needs to be put in place.

Funding sources include:
1. Park district recreation fund
2. CDDG, which are federal funds administered by city or township and used for social services. These monies have to be used by Urbana residents. UPD receives between $ 2,000-8,000 per year from this fund.
3. CCRS helps families with childcare and summer camp counts. Summer camp is the time the UPD gets the most requests for scholarships and they try to manage their monies accordingly.
4. Special Donor funds:

- Orange Crush Foundation, mostly basketball, but youth sports. UPD receives between $1500-$5,000. One year the money was used for Victory Park playground
- Individual donors often give as much as $1,000 each. Plus there is space in the enrollment form to contribute to the scholarship fund. People often give an extra $5 or $25 or $50 in that way.
- Rock Paper Scissors program run by students in the Department of Recreation, Sport and Tourism. This group wants to send kids to summer camp. The UPD typically receives between $9,000-$11,000 and Champaign Park District receives the same amount. Last year, instead of a rock, paper, scissors tournament, they hosted a camp-like festival. The slogan was "Be a Kid for a Kid." Ellen noted that the students really work hard selling tickets.

Increased funding: Staff would like to identify more funding sources but one challenge is that, while it gets more requests than it can fill, not all scholarship money ends up being used. UPDAC members noted that almost 20% of scholarship money that is awarded ends up not being used. Dana suggested that sometimes that occurs because people typically request full scholarships and if only a partial is

awarded they still can't afford or choose not to attend. It also was suggested that perhaps transportation was an issue; children want to come to programs but even with scholarships, can't get to the location.

Martin asked whether there was any kind of feedback form and Gary suggested that when applicants are notified by letter about their scholarship that a feedback form is provided with that letter. Then UPD can collect actual information about people's reasons for not using a scholarship. Nancy noted that people's lives are chaotic and the chances of them taking the time to respond are low. However, Gary noted, often when people are angry or disappointed they might be more likely to take the time to respond.

Staff has considered looking at partnerships for scholarships and would ultimately like to make the scholarship fund sustainable.

Dana also mentioned something that had been discussed but not acted on yet. That is, instead of only providing individual scholarships, to offer a program for free for everyone. That might reduce paperwork and lower barriers to getting access to programs. There was some concern that a wholly free program might been lower participation rates, but perhaps a nominal $5 fee would offset that, said Nancy.

Carl made a second observation, that perhaps we didn't need actual money to provide these scholarships. In other words, once a program is set up with enough paying participants adding two or three non-paying participants does not increase the cost of the program overall, since personnel and equipment are already in place. While this was an intriguing idea, the group did not discuss how to administer that. Presumably it could be administered in the same way as the current scholarships, only without money!

Barriers to applying: Staff has been working for the last three years on ways to streamline and improve the application process. Currently staff tries to follow the free and reduced lunch guidelines regarding scholarships, however, applicants still have to fill out a lot of paperwork. There was discussion of whether the UPD could get a letter or other documentation from the school, instead of making people fill out all the paperwork again, asserting the applicant's financial status, but there is concern about privacy issues.

The leisure guide was passed around so UPDAC members could see the three paragraphs describing the application process. It was agreed, generally, that the amount of required documentation needed was, indeed, daunting.

The other barrier discussed was transportation. Dana made the point that it sure makes sense to go where the kids already are. Tim described a pilot program with Prairie school where UPD offered girls basketball and boys soccer. Results so far were mixed, but it will be tried again with some tweaking in the program.

Tim said the staff will provide answers to some questions next meeting and will provide UPDAC an update in four months.

The meeting was adjourned at 8:50 *Respectfully submitted by Deb Aronson*