

**EAGLE RIVER/CHUGIAK PARKS AND RECREATION
BOARD OF SUPERVISORS**

Regular Meeting Minutes – May 20, 2024

I. CALL TO ORDER

The Eagle River/Chugiak Parks and Recreation (ERCP&R) Board of Supervisors convened on May 20, 2024, at 6:37 p.m. Vice Chair Pauline Tise called the meeting to order.

II. ROLL CALL

Barbara Trost, Birchwood Community Council
Will Taygan, Chugiak Community Council
Pauline Tise, Eagle River Community Council
Ruth Armstrong, Eagle River Valley Community Council

Staff Present:
Michael Braniff
Kellie Jorgensen
Jeffrey Urbanus

FLAMI Representative:
Chris Canterbury

III. MINUTES

April 8, 2024, minutes were approved unanimously.

IV. PUBLIC COMMENTS

Austin Skelley- Board President Chugiak Soccer Club (CSC), values partnership for several decades and aims to enhance and not undermine. CSC currently has 250 members and 20 coaches. The club would struggle to exist without the partnership with parks and recreation and value the public private partnership. The concern is future access to Oberg Field and the McDonald Center. Without facilities, the soccer club would be unable to provide a training experience for youth. This year there was an unprecedented shortage of field allocations stating there was a 25% reduction originally, although provided adjudicated times providing more time, it is still not enough. He is concerned that the public private partnership has been devalued. Parks and recreation are masters of park but not in providing recreation, the clubs provide the rec. He doesn't feel parks and recreation values the partnership of the Chugiak Soccer Club. He stated they cannot look for other options. He stated they should not have to share resources and allocation of fields with other organizations or groups just because they ask or should be expected equitable distribution based on the size of club.

Kenneth Dawson- Has been involved in Eagle River soccer since 1995 and has coached for many organizations for many years. CSC has partnered with parks and recreation for many years and CSC used to assist with field clean ups. As coaches, they try to be good stewards of the field. Historically they are asking to take into account the relationship with Chugiak Soccer Club and parks and recreation and how it affects kids staying out of trouble. He is stating he does not have issues with other organizations requesting field time but is asking the question if they serve the community or have kids there or are they just grabbing field permits to not allow others to have the fields and do they even have kids there.

Paula Ra- Longtime Eagle River resident with three kids involved in CSC. The Board of Chugiak Soccer Club is almost exclusively Eagle River residents. We take care of the facilities and have for years paid out of pocket to line fields and supply the goals and leave up for public use. Not all user groups are from this area and it kind of makes you wonder. We are not here to demand or act entitled to facilities but to advocate for the club.

Cat Ruesch- Technical Director of CSC, from this town and from a military family. Breaks my heart that my daughters might not have access to these facilities. We have always helped to maintain the fields. There is much pride in playing in these fields. There is so much love and community that goes into the facility and this permitting cycle this year has removed the human aspect to Oberg Field and we don't have same access as that we have always had. The program has grown a lot this year. We want good kids to come back to the community. If we cannot continue to have our program run the way it has run it will affect future generations of kids.

Individual (couldn't hear name)- Has two kids in the club, here to ask to fix the decision and go back to how it has been historically. This decision does harm to the community and to Chugiak Soccer Club. It's not that there isn't another field to go to but Oberg is by far the only good field in the area that can host competitive soccer. Most of the club can't and won't go to Anchorage for practice and games. There are other facilities where recreation teams and recreation players can play and we ask that those groups go there instead.

Brian Wilson- Program Director CYSA. stated he has 2800 participants and feeds CSC. CYSA has asked for fields at Oberg, McDonald Center, etc. We share times and coordinate with other groups. We can share the community facilities and on behalf of CYSA, everyone fights for time and it's detrimental to the kids. It should be about kids in the community.

Justin Gray- Military community member. He has seen in the last 14 months this club has grown which is great for these kids. It is a real shame if the kids joining in this club don't get opportunity to play more on fields. You have 250 kids here and ready to go, not sure that is case of whomever else is trying to use field time.

Kara Tierney- Military family, has family in CYSA and joined CSC for more competition. The club is important to her son participating in. She is hoping parks and recreation can change mind and gives more time.

Megan Foster- CYS board and CSC board member. I didn't realize access to facilities was an issue until moving to Alaska. This is a big problem and there is much stress about getting field time for CYSA and CSC. I found out they (CSC) didn't get permitted time they needed, and they will need to go to Ravenwood so it's a big deal. If they cannot start getting facility access, we all are trying to find more facility time for everyone and trying to find our own land and sponsorship. We have the interest but no where to do it. Please give us the time we need to keep trying to find access to more facilities, we will take care of facility and want this partnership desperately bad.

Pauline Tise stated she is a soccer player and it is important to her and that she was just recently made aware of the issue with Oberg field and would be following up with more questions about the situation.

Will Taygan thanked the community for coming and further described the role of community council members and the parks Board of Supervisors. He explained the Board of Supervisors involvement in budgets and stating priorities for Parks and Recreation staff to execute.

Barb Trost asked who was here for Soccer and who was here otherwise.

Catherine Ringsmen- Explained her professional employment as a historian and the role of a historian in a community. She conveyed Oberg Fields are significant for recreational opportunities especially for soccer and Chugiak Soccer Club. She explained the club was instrumental to her kid's development.

Dan Traxinger- Here for softball and described his private public partnership with Arctic Heat at Loretta French with 250 volunteer hours cleaning up the park. In five years we refurbished the softball fields and operate now 4 fields. We have held showcase events for college recruits, we host major tournaments, and major high school events. This is all done with collaborative efforts with Parks and Recreation. I got involved in this as I received questions asking if we were having similar issues with getting access to fields. Some of this lies on the board and some on the director of Eagle River, this is our 4th one. The office itself has not been running as smooth as it could. You can tell me to pound sand or change course. Soccer is here, I am here, the bike folks are here, and hockey. I am here to support soccer and saying it's a good thing in this community. Our organization has \$50K in grant money going into Loretta French, it is very important to soccer, to use, to everyone. I will end with there is a discussion of MAC going to the city. I am asking where is the Audit that occurred and if the audit was stopped who did it and why. I am concerned about translation of this to the MAC.

Tyler (last name?)– Played on Oberg fields himself as a child and his daughter have played as well. Playing soccer and the coaches of Chugiak Soccer Club has significantly improved the quality of life for his daughter Having to make last minute schedule changes and adjustments to

accommodate other user groups is challenging for families to have consistency in schedules. Recreational or competitive soccer is essential for all kids to be able to recreate.

Pauline Tise thanked everyone for speaking and stated their contributions are what makes these meetings worthwhile.

V. Director's Update

Kellie Jorgensen gave the following updates. She presented the updated dashboard for April/May. Hiring we are hoping to have the General Foreman coming onboard for this upcoming Monday. Many kuddos to the Maintenance team, jobs are hard to fill as many places of employment are seeing and these are the folks doing the backbreaking work, please give them a pat on the back if you see them in the parks. We are still looking for seasonal Caretaker 1 and II and lifeguards. We are looking to expand operational capacity of the pool and we do need lifeguards in order to do this. We have classes for lifeguarding happening in June. We are currently updating and upgrading more activities to Activenet software to transition to online and more accessible avenues to customers and the community. We are working with user groups to have user permits and partnership agreements in place. When I first came in there were no user agreements in place so I have been working to meet with all the user groups to get things in place as nothing was in place when I came onboard in January. We are also creating more opportunities for site permits and non-competitive commercial permits (i.e. tours, activities, etc.). There currently is a survey for Pickleball and Tennis courts on Schroeder and Firehouse lane. We do want community input on what they would like out of the three options presented so please use the link to vote. There are significant upticks in vandalism so we are asking the community to keep a watchful eye and let us know so we can mitigate as best as possible. The Chugiak pool heat exchanger has had some hiccups getting functional. Dan Hagarman has been wonderful and diligent hand feeding the system to be sure the pool is available and operational despite the challenges. The Eagle River Triathlon is hosting out of pool the swim portion of the event the first part of June. This summer all capital improvement projects we are collecting from user groups and the community to present to board of supervisors for consideration and prioritization presenting in August. Jeff Urbanus and I have been working to do playground inventories and assessments and looking to update and upgrade cohesively with newer safety standards and accessible equipment to everyone.

Michael Braniff stated with soccer and softball, he appreciated the testimony and getting this on record is important and shows where the community is at and where priorities are at and he appreciates everyone participating in the public process.

A community member asked when can we expect response to public testimony on behalf of the Chugiak Soccer Club. Michael Braniff stated we will work with all this permitting and stated that this permitting has taken place since last board of supervisors meeting so he could imagine board of supervisors would like to be informed more about what is taking place.

Michael stated he owed Cat and others a response of the permitting today and he viewed us as having completed the schedule and we should have out before the week is over.

A community member asked about vandalism and if there is any coordination with APD to get out in front of. Kellie Jorgensen stated there have been mixed answers historically and while still learning the history of the organization, I have been told APD is inundated as well. Parks and Recreation has been told to keep an eye on vandalism and dependent on workload and capacity APD may/may not be able to respond timely. Michael Braniff stated Karen Richards is very passionate about long term maintenance and Karen is a watchdog when it comes to vandalism. Karen and the team have done a great job for advocating for parks and asking for help but we understanding we don't set the tier level or priority for field work for APD. Jeff Urbanus stated as vandalism got worse last year we were looking to place cameras and post cameras in use signage towards the end of the summer and then school started and that solved the issues majorly. Jeff said he has been speaking with local community neighbors at Oberg in regard to the vandalism last summer. Continuity from last summer we at least have posted signage, if the vandalism starts up again, we will be better prepared to put cameras up this year.

Barbara Trost asked about user group agreements. Kellie Jorgensen clarified there are no user agreements in place in totality, not just this year.

Will Taygan stated we have permits and most clubs have use permits, historically there have been more contracts (MOU) which is a maintenance agreement different than a permit. Permits are something that staff does and contracts come under review of the board of Supervisors. Will said he was confused on what Kellie stated about the vendor site permits and non-competitive commercial business permits. Kellie clarified that for example the kayak rentals at mirror lake were a vendor site permit that he has a space that he can operate out of, dog sled tours are another example of this type of permit and it helps us provide recreational opportunities such as dog mushing. Will stated he wasn't sure what line was permit versus contract, i.e. one day event for permits and non-profit permits that could be considered contracts. Will stated if we are doing long term agreements with private organizations if that falls under the budget review. He stated he wanted a conversation about permits.

Michael Braniff stated what we talked about here is permitting use for different public assets, aside from the McDonald Center. Cooperative use agreement is an agreement with cooperative use –i.e. you have agreed to take on maintenance of items and because of that you have exclusive use of fields during time windows x,y,z. The challenge is that here in Chugiak Eagle River there truly is one set of soccer fields and we cannot enter into an agreement if there is nothing else to offer. We need to advocate for the development of new soccer fields and to start would be at the community councils that provide feedback to us in how to invest public dollars. We would consider Oberg fields a regional park, so truly it belongs in all community councils for consideration. I encourage everybody that when community council surveys come out to advocate for what they wish to have happen as more advocacy helps support projects.

Dan Traxinger said he is resistant to CUAs and his concern when hearing that is the moving of additional responsibilities to clubs and organizations and non-profits. He stated they do not have the time to allocate to provide further maintenance. Moving more responsibilities to groups is of major concern.

Michael Braniff stated what our job is to discuss options to user groups and explain what the different possibilities look like.

Barbara Trost asked to comment about the 25% allocation of CSC and fields allocated to others not in community. Michael stated he was newer to the issues and at its core it appears we have a user group that is well established with a long history and cooperatively shared with one other group Birchwood Christian School and now, why we are all here, is the desire for the emergence of a new smaller club. Our challenge as permitters of these assets is to weigh the need but treat everyone fairly and provide opportunity. I was able to learn from Cat and the gentleman starting the new club and asked his needs of which was Monday-Thursday 10AM-12PM and 2PM-4PM he would like to reserve one half of one field for the months of June and July. I instructed Kellie to build into a schedule and that is what we have here in this schedule. One of the things conveyed to the gentleman is that if we permit use of a field and the club does not take off and field is not utilized, we will pull that back and reallocate the asset back to other users. This is challenging for a department about how do we fairly create opportunities for all users and time and area of user demand. Ultimately, we do not decide who winners and losers are of youth sports organizations through the permitting process. The parents and families are the ones who ultimately decide if a new organization will take off and flourish, and if that doesn't take place, we will reallocate field time.

Will stated if we are having some long-term private permits he wants to flag and look more into to which Kellie stated it has been done in the past and she just wanted to make sure it is done properly.

Cat Ruesch clarified that initially they got 25% of what they requested and since meeting with Mike and Kellie received more time. This other individual isn't a concern, but the process how it was approached is. It seemed like the past what we did was not relevant and when sharing historical information about this individual we were shut down. We could make it work with fields we were allocated but the issue what we are having is listening to concerns about an individual and why they are concerns, ignoring factual statements about sanctioning of program- we know because he used to run the club. If we will welcome someone from Anchorage to use our fields, that's the concern as he doesn't live here. He is using Oberg because he knows we use the fields. The issue is greater than that and it's not the permit allocation because Parks and Recreation worked hard to get more fields, what happened that was a past gentleman's agreement changed. We did not get everything we asked for and the biggest user group needs to get the field use that is where the issue is. The issue isn't that someone else is using fields but rather who that someone is.

Michael Braniff said he agrees that we got 95% there in regard to what was requested and received, the last update he stated dates in June and July we can accommodate both of those and we will move the other group/individual to accommodate those dates/needs.

Austin Skelley stated that he maintained a cordial relationship with individual in question. He stated that the character of the director in past, falsifying municipal documents were of concern. We are not afraid of him being in Eagle River and wish him the best in competition. When we lose a week of camp due to his operation, that sits poorly with us when we have college coaches coming to the camp.

Michael Braniff stated there is behavior as a permittee that will have permits revoked and stated now that we are aware of concerns we would keep an eye on this summer closely.

Jeff Urbanus gave a project update. Jeff stressed upon community participation managing capital projects. We have a wonderful thing in this service area to program capital projects. It is surprising how difficult it is to get feedback from user groups and the community. Kellie mentioned we will get with user groups again to get priorities. I did attempt this last summer as well and over half of user groups didn't even respond. Michael mentioned the process in community councils to prioritize and Chugiak was the only council to respond. It is difficult to prioritize projects when there is no input in the community. I encourage those here to do beyond tonight to continue to advocate for their priorities. It is important to reach out to clubs, community councils, and board members and it is important feedback. Oberg Field we are hoping to have contractors under contract for drainage ditch repair this summer. The ditches will be regraded and we will replace the culverts and also put a pathway from the pavilion straight to the field and culverts to go between the fields. We are hoping this work can be done this summer and not interfere with soccer. Oberg playground is another project after commentary at board of supervisor meeting previously advocating for playground we are reviewing. We are going through the community and assessing and inventorying and working with contractors and playground designers to get some playground improvements at Oberg and other parks possibly this summer but likely next summer. Barb Trost requested last month as status of the grant; we did get grant from state of alaska for the new mushing trail loop. It will be a 2025 construction project. Beach Lake Multi-use Trail out to ocean will start in July. The Mirror/Edmonds Lake Master Plan is well under way with public workshops this summer and opportunities to provide input. The Mount Baldy contract is in place and we are waiting for snow to melt. The trailhead is on park land and we are hoping to change the parking lot and improve asphalt and drainage. The Peter's Creek Dog Park public hearing is Wednesday night and we encourage those to attend the Urban Design Commission for public hearing opportunities. There are neighbors that do have concerns about change of views due to park establishment.

Will Taygan stated the dog park project started because of the Chugiak Community council to get people off of Loretta French ball fields.

Jeff continued to state that the Schroeder park tennis/pickleball courts is a previous project and there have been community concerns. We are getting more information on what the

configuration should be via survey and community outreach. Tennis net posts are still on Schoeder and are used as a barrier currently between pickleball courts or for tennis play. Many places in town Pickleball is auxiliary but the intent of this project would be different and we got negative feedback on so that's what we are looking at. We would have a lock box or contractor box to sign a key for the season to play with nets on site. I do think that project will finish this year. Anyone who uses the Beach Lake Chalet Trails, they are in rough shape and we are hoping to contract to fix and improve trails. There are Beach Lake Lodge repairs this summer as well in progress. The Arctic Heat softball club did a tremendous job fundraising for scoreboards and there will be four scoreboards and we will provide the trenching and electrical support for. By the end of summer we are hoping there will be functioning electronic scoreboards and batting cages, there is one now but we are getting a second one for the girls softball league.

FLAMI Update

Chris Canterbury gave the Fire Lake Arena Management Inc. (FLAMI) board update. There was an Request For Proposal (RFP) put out for bid. Periodically the Purchasing Department puts out request for proposal and we worked to submit our proposal as a non-profit in April. The RFP is in limbo at the moment, Kellie and Michael talked with Tony and I last week. Our General Manager is leaving 4 June and we need a new general manager. That position has been posted for a couple months and have several candidates which Kellie has been part of those interviews. We have a few candidates that are viable, one in Oregon that operates a rink currently, one is an Eagle River resident returning to Alaska, and one is in Anchorage currently. With the RFP status as it is, it is difficult to hire a manager. The scheduling of the RFP timing is not great, we should in the future look at a different time frame to post this RFP and contracts associated with the McDonald Center instead of in the middle of everyone's season. We can't even sell ice for the next season currently because of timing. Mike and Kellie have expressed to us that the Municipality of Anchorage is under the ability to take over the facility itself and would like to do that. That is not realistic in short order due to the reality of transitioning folks over, but we will need an interim contract in place that would get us through the next season. We have a meeting with the FLAMI board to decided next steps and our authorization going forward. The Municipality and FLAMI are in sync with maintaining the heritage of the facility and mission of providing recreation opportunities at a low cost for the community. It is concerning to hear of the soccer concerns this evening as it is a difficulty for the hockey community as well with limited resources in the community. The difference is that there was litigation in the past with hockey and now there is legal precedent on how to allocate ice in the Municipality. There are always competing groups with interests that split off and compete for facility time. Chris stated that hockey ice is not authorized to organizations not recognized under the hockey association. What is equitable and fair gets to be a measure of discretion in the community and which groups are long standing and which one should be next in line.. I am not sure the status of the board on the decision process of the RFP.

Pauline Tise stated she does have concerns with the direction of the McDonald Center going forward. She sentimented that she would not want the MAC to mimic rinks in Anchorage operationally.

Chris stated If there is a rejection to RFP there needs to be justification. Pauline stated the Municipality is a better alternative than a for profit organization managing.

Ruth Armstrong stated that she did not appreciate information coming from the rumor mill and that information should be coming from parks and rec. She stated there needed to be an executive session to discuss the RFP.

Michael Braniff discussed that there should be two executive sessions, one this evening and one at a later date.

CYSA stated there is a lot of concern with what is going to happen with the MAC as they just requested for field time at the MAC. He stated that if there is a turnover everything is in flux and if we are expecting contracted time on the field, that is a huge impact for the kids in the community.

Will stated again the role of the board as they establish policies and priorities for staff to carry out, as an oversight board. We are responsible for commenting on any contracts before going to the assembly. We make recommendations and establish guidelines. We approve and review the annual budgets and make recommendations and comments on contract but don't approve contracts.

Chris stated that since the RFP was due in April, the board probably already met, he was not sure that they reviewed or provided comments to the proposal. Will stated that we should have an executive session to review and this was not appropriate to discuss in public.

DISCUSSION

Barb had the question of if there could be a list of user groups provided by Parks and Recreation for every year who has permits or agreements in place. Ruth asked for the organization charts for Eagle River/Chugiak and the capital improvement projects for previous years. Kellie stated we are still working through capital improvements updating and stated that she is working with OMB to clean up and present updated and accurate information as well. Will asked to Chris that he had mentioned contract renewal for May/June would be better and if that was correct and asked when we would need to renew contracts. Chris stated Ice allocations are happening as we speak and stated we need to rethink how these contracts start/end in the future to lessen potential impacts to users of recreation facility.

Mark Littlefield stated that he was appreciate for everyone that came out to speak this evening and brought up interesting conversations and stated he would like to attend the executive session if appropriate and thanked everyone for all they did and hoped that everyone could all work it out because there was a lot to work out.

Chris stated that he would be hopeful to bring to Mark's attention that if there is a seat on the board of supervisors potentially in the future that would just speak to the MAC Center.

VI. ADJOURNMENT

Pauline Tise asked for a motion to adjourn and move to executive session. A motion was made, it was seconded, the meeting adjourned around 8:40 PM



Pauline Tise, Vice Chair

Date

Kellie Jorgensen, Deputy Director

Date

Michael Braniff, Director