

MINUTES

Parks and Recreation Commission of the Augusta County Parks and Recreation Commission

Wednesday, August 18, 2021, 7:00 PM

PRESENT: Kirk Barley, Vice Chair
Steve Morelli, Member
Sally Williams, Member
Ernie Landes, Member
Leon Bartley, Member
Ronnie Ritchie, Member
Samantha Bosserman, Member
Larry Curry, Chair

ABSENT: None

1. Call to Order

Mr. Curry called the meeting to order at 7:00pm.

2. Comments by the Public

Aaron Hill and Christy Simmons of Weyers Cave, Virginia were present and asked to address the Commission.

Daryl Lambert and Tonya Lambert of Mount Sidney, Virginia were present and asked to address the Commission.

Christy Simmons and Tonya Lambert approached the Commission and provided a top 5 wish list created by the Friends of the Natural Chimneys campers group.

Ms. Simmons stated the group met on August 4, 2021 to come up with their top 5 wishes for the Commission. She provided a copy of the attached list for Commission members. Ms. Simmons added Mrs. Lambert created a Facebook group named Friends of the Natural Chimneys. Mrs. Lambert read the about section of the page and stressed the goal of the page is to provide a positive and productive open forum for campers to discuss changes they would like to see in the campground and give ideas for improvement.

Ms. Simmons addressed the Commission concerning questions they asked at the July meeting. In answer to the first question, would the camping group be willing to take an active role in preparing and arranging activities for the campground. Ms. Simmons stated the group would not be interested in taking an active role in planning and facilitating group activities. She stated the group would not be opposed to helping with the activity, but do not want to be in charge of it. They feel, as campers, they would prefer to enjoy the activity rather than run it. They would rather Natural Chimneys staff run any activities. Mr. Morelli asked if our intern, Adam Basham, is still working at Natural Chimneys Park. Mr. Wells stated Mr. Basham is no longer an intern. He moved to a part time status and

will continue working at Natural Chimneys. He is currently a student at JMU. He further stated we have one full time and 2 part time staff working at Natural Chimneys Park as well as maintenance and camp cleaning staff.

Mrs. Lambert asked what duties the Program Coordinator position that recently closed will be. Mr. Wells told her the position is for a promotions and special events coordinator. The person hired for the Program Coordinator position will handle promotions and special events at all of our parks. Mrs. Lambert asked if Mr. Wells could foresee any of the activities the campers group are requesting organized by this position. Mr. Wells informed her it is possible, but our department is down several staff members from 3-4 years ago. We have provided those types of activities at Natural Chimneys Park in the past when the department staff was full. There will be a period of training and building back of staff which needs to happen before anything of that nature could be organized. Larger scale events that take place at any of our parks take more planning as regulations and safety measures must be taken. Mr. Wells stated events and activities on public land are more scrutinized than those events taking place on private land. Mrs. Lambert asked for an example. Mrs. Williams stated hayrides have liabilities that make it hard for the public sector to provide. In the private sector the liabilities for that type of event are not as great. Mrs. Lambert asked if that means having a hayride at Natural Chimneys Park would be impossible. Mr. Wells said it would not be impossible, but far from simple and research into how it could be done would need to take place.

Mrs. Lambert asked the Commission if anything had been looked into since the last meeting. Mr. Wells asked if she meant in regard to hayrides. He told her that parks and recreation staff have been looking at hayrides for the last 10 years. Insurance changes over the years so there is an ever changing amount of liability. Mr. K Barley stated in his 25 years involved with the Boys Scouts there were a lot of activities the Boy Scouts could not do because of liability issues. It becomes a matter of risk verse reward. Mrs. Lambert asked if an analysis had been done. She stated an analysis is free. Mrs. Bosserman explained an analysis is not free for the government.

Mrs. Lambert asked what are the roadblocks to having the hayride. She stated she was under the impression the Commission would have answers to the lists presented at the July meeting. Mrs. Bosserman stated it was decided at the last meeting the camping group would give us a top five wish list at this meeting. She stated the Commission now has the list and discussion can take place since a priority has been established.

Mr. Morelli informed Mrs. Lambert the request made for restroom upgrades has been addressed and the 2 restrooms in questions will be fixed. He stated he spoke with the County Administrator, Mr. Fitzgerald, in regard to the events and activities the group has requested. Mr. Morelli stated he and Mr. Fitzgerald feel there needs to be a balance in the campground for those that enjoy having a quiet experience with those that want more entertainment. This will not happen overnight as consideration for this type of activity needs to take place.

The camp store is another concern for the camping group. Mr. Morelli stated a camp store is in the works. He stated he had not addressed the dump site question to anyone,

but did plan to talk with the camp hosts, Bobby and Anita Johnson about the upgrading the markers for each campsite. This will help campers clearly read the campsite markers even at night.

Mrs. Lambert stated the group doesn't want to bother Bobby and Anita with their requests. They would like to see parks and recreation add monthly entertainment. Mr. Morelli informed her that some of the minor items are already being worked on and parks and recreation are working on possible movies. Mrs. Bosserman interjected and stated playing movies at a Government function is vastly different than having them in your backyard. Permits are required and movie costs vary depending on the popularity. There is also a fee every time the movie is shown. Mr. Wells stated he has been in touch with several companies all of which can not take the job as they are short on staff.

Mrs. Lambert stated the group is interested in knowing what is happening month to month to see how their requests are progressing. Mr. Morelli said he is happy to inform the group through a phone call using one of their members as the point of contact. He stated the contact person can then push the information out to the rest of the group.

Ms. Simmons stated the pool fees were not on the top five list, but the group thought maybe adding a checkbox for swimming online may help people be able to pay ahead for the pool with their camping reservation. She stated if they pay for it with their reservation then no refund would be issued for bad weather. This gives citizens the option to either include the pool fee or not depending on if they want to swim. Mr. Morelli informed Ms. Simmons roughly 85% of campers do not use the pool and do not want to increase the camping fee. Discussions between Mr. Morelli and Mr. Wells had formed the possibility of a bundle option for camping and swimming. Further discussion on pool fees will take place in the offseason.

Ms. Simmons informed the Commission on the issue of dry camping, meaning no water access, the group wanted to know if the rate would be decreased due to not having water access. Mr. K Barley stated those are issues that need to be worked out in the off season when fees and plans for next camping season take place. Mr. Wells stated those issues likely won't be worked out until December.

A discussion took place on how the group can help get the items done at Natural Chimneys Park that cost more money than the County can budget for. The Commission informed Mrs. Lambert and Ms. Simmons about the Matching Grant Program and about approaching their Board of Supervisor members with the groups ideas. If a Board of Supervisor member wants to help a project get funded they have the ability to supply some of their available district money for that particular project. The Board of Supervisor member would need 4 other Board members to agree to the project for the money allocated to pass for that project.

Mrs. Bosserman suggested the group become a 501C3, nonprofit. She explained if the group puts in the effort and work to become a non profit it may help the Board of Supervisors see the group are serious in their endeavors. Mr. Wells informed Mrs. Lambert and Ms. Simmons the information for the Matching Grant Program is on our website. He further clarified that Matching Grants are generally used to award money to a

501C3 for use on private property. Mr. Wells stated the County has put over 2 million dollars into Natural Chimneys Park since obtaining it. He stated citizens may not know it because those improvements have not been highly visible items. One major project was the new well, which was close to 1 million dollars.

There was discussion about the swimming pool now having a beach entry and umbrella fountain for children and for handicap accessibility. Mr. Wells stated the old pool we had before was not repairable which is what led to the beach entry.

Mr. Wells addressed some of the issues on the group's top five list as well as some from the previously presented list. In regard to food trucks at Natural Chimneys Park, he stated it would not be impossible. There will be additional preparation required. Mrs. Lambert asked if parks and recreation could just have a sign up list for those trucks that would like to participate. Mr. Wells stated parks and recreation have tried previously, but there was not a lot of interest because Natural Chimneys Park is remote. As for the possibility of a second dump site, this has been looked at but if it is added a water treatment plant may be needed for all the handling of "gray water" and sewage. The campground is on a flood plain so even adding additional restrooms would require a treatment plant if new land is not acquired. Building code and public health regulations for campgrounds have changed significantly compared to when the first park was established. A camp store was in the works, but due to the pandemic budget allocations for it have been delayed. Mrs. Lambert stated she feels the list they provided will benefit all campers. She further stated if items on the list are not attainable that is ok the group would just like to know why.

Mrs. Williams asked if it would be possible to put in the ice machine in place before the camp store is open. Mr. Wells stated parks and recreation lumped the money for the ice machine with the camp store request when it was presented to the Board of Supervisors.

Mr. Ritchie asked Mrs. Lambert what the group meant by "administrative involvement/ interest/ investment" on the list. Mrs. Lambert stated the group means interest in what they would like to see happen at Natural Chimneys Park. The group would like to hear more about why the items they would like to see can not happen instead of just a no answer. Mr. Landes asked if Mrs. Lambert now felt she had been given reasons and more information regarding the items presented. She stated she now has a better understanding.

Ms. Simmons summarized her next steps as taking information back to the camping group about becoming a 501C3 and ways to get grants. Mr. Morelli suggested after the group becomes a nonprofit they can reach out to local corporations to see if they will donate money for the items. Mr. Wells stated the campground also plans to go to all 50 camp sites but that will take time and money. Mrs. Lambert stated the group has no timeline for things to be completed. They just want to know where the items stand.

Another item on the top five list is the honey wagon. Mrs. Williams inquired about what a honey wagon is. Ms. Simmons stated it is a portable dump tank for sewage. Mr. K Barley asked if parks and recreation could outsource that service. Mr. Wells stated to use a portable dump tank publicly the person providing the service must be certified in using

it. A person can have one and use it for their own personal use but can not use it for multiple people and charge for the use.

Mrs. Lambert asked about live entertainment once a month. Mr. Wells said parks and recreation has been looking in to the possibility, but are trying to find the balance between those wanting that service and those not wanting it. Parks and recreation staff have been looking in to appropriate entertainment that won't interrupt campers wanting a quieter experience. If entertainment is offered it would be open to the public. Natural Chimneys is a county park that has a campground and the park needs to be accessible to the public during operating hours.

Mr. K Barley asked to end the discussion and move on with the agenda.

2.1 Top Five Wish List for Natural Chimneys Park

[Top 5 wish list for NC Park 8.18.21.pdf](#)

3. **Adoption of Minutes**

3.1 July 2021 minutes for approval

Mr. Curry asked the Commission if any changes to the July 2021 minutes needed to be made. There being none, he asked for a motion to approve.

[July 2021 minutes.pdf](#)

Larry Curry moved to approve .

Samantha Bosserman seconded the motion, which carried unanimously.

4. **Treasurer's Report**

4.1 August Treasurer's Report

Mr. Wells highlighted the Treasurer's report. There were no questions or comments about the report.

[2021 AUGUST Treasurers report.pdf](#)

5. **Director's Report**

5.1 August Director's Report

Mr. Wells highlighted the Director's report for the Commission. There were no questions or comments about the report.

[August 2021. Directors report.pdf](#)

6. **Matters to be presented by the Commission**

Mr. Ritchie informed the Commission that he met with Mr. Wells and Mr. Landes at the New Hope Community Center to look at some identified needs of the facility. There are some water damage repairs needed at the indoor batting cage and the indoor bathroom facilities are not currently working. The property is owned by Augusta County but is leased to the local Ruritan Club who manages and administers use of the property. It is physically in the middle river district. Mr. Sprouse will have maintenance look at fixing the

water damage. Possibly \$25,000 for a quick repair. Mr. Ritchie will reach out to the Board of Supervisor in charge of the middle river district, Mr. Garber.

7. Matters to be presented by Staff

There were no matters to be presented by staff.

8. Old Business

No old business was reported at this time.

9. New Business

No new business was reported at this time.

10. Announcement of Next Meeting and Adjournment

Mr. Curry announced the next meeting set for September 15, 2021. Arrangements will be made to hold the meeting at New Hope Community Center. The meeting may be held at 6:30 to allow for time for viewing the grounds and facility.

Mr. Curry asked to adjourn.

The meeting adjourned at 8:28pm.

Larry Curry moved to adjourn .

Kirk Barley seconded the motion, which carried unanimously.