

PARKS AND RECREATION/EDUCATION, ARTS AND CULTURE COMMITTEE
SEPTEMBER 9, 2011
3:25 P.M.

Councilman Gilbert, Chairman, called the meeting of the Parks and Recreation/Education, Arts and Culture Committee to order with Councilmen Rico, Ladd, Berz, Benson, Scott, Murphy, and Robinson present. Councilman McGary joined the meeting later. City Attorney Michael McMahan; Management Analyst Randy Burns; and Shirley Crownover, Assistant Clerk to the Council, were also present.

Others present included Dan Johnson, Richard Beeland, Greta Hayes, Johnny Feagans, Vickie Haley, Ron Swafford, Larry Zehnder, Chief Parker, Dickie Hutsell, Mark Thomas, Cedric Collins, Brian Griffin, Brittany Cash, Chris Brown and Barbara Readnower. Dardee Long joined the meeting later.

'FRIENDS OF THE ZOO' CONSULTANT REPORT

Adm. Zehnder noted that we would first hear from "Friends of the Zoo" and then there would be a presentation on Youth Development. He asked FOZ to come forward to make their presentation. This included Pete Serodino and Darde Long.

Mr. Serodino stated that he was with FOZ and had with him David Walsh, who is our lead consultant; that he had been here on five occasions to look at the zoo and the people. He turned the meeting over to David Walsh.

Mr. Walsh stated that he would give a brief overview of the Strategic Plan and would cover the highlights. He noted that the Plan included Summary Findings; Mission, Vision, Strategic Goals; Organization and Board Goals; and Priorities. He presented a quick overview of his Firm, Schultz & Williams of Philadelphia, Pennsylvania. He explained that they were a national planning firm that works with non-profits and zoos; that they worked with small and large groups; that they looked at the leadership of the Zoo and the whole operation and future progress.

He stated that this started in December of 2010; that the Zoo decided to bring in outside expertise and employed them; that they had been here for seven meetings and five visits; that the first was the Assessment Phase, where they looked at the Zoo and its furnishings and tools; that they had the opportunity to visit with the Staff and the Board and also extended stakeholders; that they wanted to find out what people think about the Zoo in order to move forward—that this was the Assessment Phase; that they looked at opportunities and what works here and made recommendations to the Zoo.

Mr. Walsh stated that they visited lots of zoos across the country and Chattanooga had an excellent asset to be proud of—that it was an amazing thing; that what is impressive here is how the Zoo gets—“the bang for a buck”. He went on to say that much larger zoos would be envious of the entrance to the Chattanooga Zoo; that the entrance was equal to the entrance of a zoo with one million people in attendance. He noted that there was also a very passionate and energetic Staff.

He stated that another thing they looked at was the Plan for the Zoo—that the Chattanooga community is very vibrant and has a strong tourist base; there is also a strong public-private partnership, which all zoos must have to be successful.

Mr. Walsh went over some of the highlights, noting that there was a real increase in conservation and sustainability, which was an integral part—that Dardee Long and her team had done so much with conservation efforts. He again mentioned the successful public-private partnership and the move to privatization. He noted that what is seen across the board with zoos is an upward trend in attendance because zoos are a value-based attraction; that zoos are close to home and attendance and membership is growing.

He stated that another thing to look at is where we focus resources, and we look at earned revenue—that the biggest return is at the front gate; that one of the recommendations to Dardee was to look at increasing attendance and also pricing strategies and tie this in with membership to generate the greatest return.

Mr. Walsh stated that one other thing is to take a look at what other attractions membership needs to provide; that one of the things in the zoo market is to provide something new—that each year there needs to be something new such as a theme park model; that he recommended exploring the introduction of something new, mentioning such things as camel rides, other types of rides, interactive bird feeding, and adventure type courses; that touch and interaction were making a comeback.

He went on to talk about types of activities and play structures, noting that one of the themes is “parallel play”, where people mimic what the animals are doing; that he would encourage how to tie in play and activities

Mr. Walsh talked about some of the key planning issues—the transition to a privately managed institution; an investment in organization capacity; enhancement of professional image as a leading attraction in the City with focused business discipline; strengthening of the organization structure to maximize efficiencies and create clear lines of accountability; growing earned revenue; developing contributed funding; and creating awareness in the community about the Zoo, especially as the Zoo has changed over the years.

He noted that there was a real need to invest to get the facility looking great and on the organization side, hiring vet techs and marketing people—to make sure there is a strong organizational structure and to enhance the Zoo’s image as a primary destination. He urged to attempt to target people who had not been out to the Zoo in a long time for market awareness, mentioning growing earned revenue so that the Zoo can be financially sustainable. There is a need to raise capital dollars and see growth for the operating side, as well. He stated that he was talking about lack of awareness, and the Zoo needed to focus on this.

Mr. Walsh then went over the new vision and mission and guiding principles, mentioning animal care, sustainability, a strong foundation, and strategic planning. He mentioned five strategic areas: Organization, Visitor Experience, Financial Stability, Board, and Awareness, emphasizing to make sure this Plan gets implemented.

He went on to talk about Strategic Plan “Take-Aways”—The Zoo needs to invest in building its organizational capacity; it needs to demonstrate its value and raise its awareness as an important asset to the Chattanooga community; it needs to continually improve and enhance the experience for its visitors with new short-and long-term programs, attractions, and exhibits; private contributed support and public government funding will always be critical to the Zoo’s financial sustainability; and the Zoo’s Board will play an integral role in the success of the Zoo by serving as Zoo ambassadors and fundraisers and providing the strategic direction needed to fulfill its mission and realize its vision. He emphasized that public support is critical and that the Board needs to be engaged in the Plan. He ended by saying that there are a lot of opportunities at the Zoo; that it is well positioned and has the right people in place, and they needed to continue to invest and create a road map for 3-5 years; that the Zoo has a lot of potential and the sky is the limit.

Councilman Benson noted that Mr. Walsh had referred to the Board casually; that he wanted to express what a good job FOZ had done; that we were fortunate to have leading citizens like Doug Warner, who was an unsung hero; that we would have no Warner Park without the Warners—that they also contributed to the Salvation Army. He stated that he appreciated the work that they had done and their heritage; that we had a real source of pride with Warner Park.

Councilman Murphy stated that he was always proud of the Zoo—that it was in his district. He mentioned combination attractions, asking if it were possible to co-market the Spray Park with one price along with the Zoo? He mentioned play structures and rides, stating that it seems like we are there with just a fence in between the two, asking if there could be an additional gate into the Spray Park and kids could go to the Zoo along with the Spray Park. Mr. Serodino indicated that he thought this could be done. Councilman Murphy stated that this was a wonderful, wonderful place. Ms. Long mentioned a combination ticket to both that went well—that this would be fairly easy and was a good idea.

YOUTH DEVELOPMENT

Chairman Gilbert mentioned the program last Saturday, stating that it was a good program; that the kids were talented, and it was well put together.

Adm. Zehnder stated that a year ago we developed a program for the youth in our City—that this was done by Greta's staff and the Youth Development Center presented a piece Saturday night; that he would let Greta talk about the objectives of the program.

Ms. Hayes thanked the Council for their support; that a huge need was being met; that they could deliver, which speaks volumes. She mentioned "PYD", taking place at the South Chattanooga Recreation Center; that the focus of the program is on those ages 12-26; that it is a unique program, where the kids tell us what they want; that we employ and engage them and are finding out their issues. She noted that this was different from anything the Department had done in the past—that the age is different (12-26), and there is a stronger focus year-round; that this is a consistent year-round program. She also mentioned the diversity of the program. She noted that it is also educational—that they teach kids how to cook and also to prepare for college and getting jobs—that skills are taught at each age. She stated that they were going to show a quick Documentary concerning the program Saturday night. First, she introduced her staff—Mark Thomas, Barbara Readnowar, Cedric Collins, Brian Griffin, Brittany Cash, and Chris Brown. She asked Mark Thomas to speak.

Mr. Thomas stated that he would give a brief overview of the components. He mentioned the STUNT Program, which he stated was promoting a real service towards the gang problem; that they were trying to deter kids from gangs, and these were the type of programs one would see with STUNT—recording studios; how to film and edit; graphic arts; and teaching teens how to relate to their seniors by growing vegetables. He went on to say that this summer they had 257 kids in the program at five recreation centers; that the centers were where there is a big gang area and where the problems lie is the location of these centers; that the kids are very interested with the programs; that they are being taught life lessons. He stated after his brief overview, we would see a Documentary, and he thanked the Council for the opportunity to do their part. STUNT stands for "Students United Taking Initiatives Against Gangs". The Documentary was shown. Ms. Hayes explained that this was a brief Documentary that was presented Saturday night; that the students made this Documentary—that these were young adults, and they were glad to be able to share with the Council the impact they were making with these young people.

After the Documentary, Councilwoman Berz stated "Great, this is fabulous"! Ms. Hayes stated "that these guys did it". Councilwoman Berz stated that Greta's group made this happen and thanked her for this gift.

Councilman McGary echoed what Councilwoman Berz had said and expressed his apology for not being present Saturday night—that he was asleep because of the birth of his fifth child on Wednesday. He stated that he did have a question concerning STUNT. He wanted to know if they had addressed the impact affecting attachment to gangs or those in gangs.

Mr. Thomas responded that all of these programs are in gang areas; that they came wearing different colors, and they brought them all together at the South Side and all of the gang members fellowshiped and came together with one common interest.

Councilwoman Scott thanked them also, stating that the Documentary was interesting and professional; that one of the things we obviously wanted was for young people to live to adulthood; that this Documentary showed the impact and goals. She asked if they could look at the statistical data of crimes in areas where they were making an impact and compare these statistics a year after.

Ms. Hayes responded that they provided a monthly report; that they wanted to start small and make sure this works; that the highest involvement is with teens and they have also utilized the Ochs Center data and were using their numbers and also working with the Gang Unit of the Police Dept.; that they were tracking gang members' arrests and letting these gang members give testimony—that the gang members had made choices, and they could pass along to others to not make the same mistakes.

Councilwoman Robinson stated that this was a wonderful activity; that she remembered making necklaces in camp when she was a young person—that this was a gift forever; that the fact that they had brought together gang members from all over was a most amazing experiment; that she was concerned that this was only in the summer and should be all year long.

Mr. Thomas responded that that was their objective—all year long; that kids could make better choices and could grow and contribute; that they wanted to do this year-round every year.

Councilman McGary jokingly stated that he would personally vote against funding unless he got some of the barbecue shown and could listen to the hip-hop. He asked for a copy of the Documentary.

Ms. Hayes mentioned that they had grown the vegetables that they were grilling.

Councilman Benson mentioned ten objectives or core values. Ms. Hayes noted that the First Tee Program has a value system. She stated that they had incorporated ten core values that were being reinforced. Councilman Benson stated that he thought one more should be added—that Civics used to be a required course; that ten values were not enough—that citizenship needed to be added. Ms. Hayes stated that they were meeting with the Greek

Council at UTC, and they were going to adopt a recreation center—that she thought this was a great match.

Councilwoman Ladd also thanked them and apologized for not being there Saturday—that she received an invitation and she was not asleep! She urged them to always invite the Council; that this is the type of message we need to get out to the community so that they can hear the value—that we often hear why spend money on Arts and Recreation—that it would be great if folks could understand the Plan and Strategy in these programs and their outreach; that we are giving quality with these youth programs and is why Hixson hopes to get a center; that this is wonderful material and all taxpayers need to see the value and why we give money to such programs—that we get great returns!

Councilwoman Berz mentioned marketing centers—that the Mid-Town Chamber Council is partnering with Parks and Recreation for a GED program; that they are showing kids that it is cool to learn to read and that also their parents can come and learn to read. She again thanked Ms. Hayes for making this happen—this investment in community centers, and it is an investment; that it promotes the health of the community. She urged to take this and other things to the Chamber Councils because they are looking for these kind of partnerships. She urged that they think about partnering with Chambers. She also advocated pursuing the concept of Community Centers and getting rid of Recreation Centers.

Councilman Murphy stated that as a former director of a Recreation Center, that he liked Recreation Centers and thought they had their place; that teaching kids how to swim can be a life and death skill; that recreation has its place; that he understood what Councilwoman Berz was saying, but we need a place to recreate, also.

Chairman Gilbert stated that he would like to place some emphasis on one person; that he challenged the City Council in asking them to give them opportunities and resources—that that person was Brian Griffin; that he came with this group and now he is a prime example—that he is a good worker (we got his services free for awhile). He asked Brian to stand. Chairman Gilbert went on to say that he was downtown this past weekend and could not move because of all the people; that we had a tournament in Chattanooga that had made money; that people were everywhere, and they loved Chattanooga; that we are making a great impact on people who will come back to Chattanooga just for our scenery. He thanked the Parks and Recreation Dept. for their vision; that they are meeting the challenge and doing a great job; that Barbara Readnowar is very organized and Mr. Zehnder has a great team.

At this point, Adm. Zehnder went over the Resolution on tonight's agenda to distribute stipends of \$300 to each student that successfully completed the Next-In-Line Student Volunteer Internship Program in an amount not to exceed \$13,800. He went on to mention that Chairman Gilbert came to the event Saturday night; that there were 80 kids on stage, and we recognized their achievement; that they were put on stage to be recognized for their

accomplishments and rewarded for positive things they had done; that it was a two and one-half hour program and was conducted “grammy-style”; that there was a red carpet and people were all dressed up; that it was a fabulous event, and he congratulated his Staff and also the volunteers. He stated that he had great people working for Parks and Recreation; that they do their jobs every day, and he thanked them for their continued work. At this point there was applause.

Councilwoman Scott asked if they planned to do an Internship Program next year? Ms. Hayes stated that they were planning ahead and had applications with local foundations for funding; that they taught job skills and accountability; that they needed to learn these skills and how to interview for a job. Councilwoman Scott asked if they were planning on doing job recommendations? Ms. Hayes responded that they were working with Virginia College and taking the next step.

Chairman Gilbert stated that they would be present again tonight at 6:00 P.M.; that he knew, as a parent, you don’t brag on your own children, but our very own Greta has a kid who has gone beyond; that she is very talented and Greta’s kid has done a great job.

Adm. Zehnder added that Greta was shy—that her daughter entered the Hershey Track and Field competition and won the State; that this was comprised of the best people throughout the country and was a National Tournament; that she came in 6th place—that butterflies had taken over; that she was very competitive; that she had gone to the National Tournament and was Greta’s daughter—that we wanted to congratulate her very much.

The meeting was adjourned at 4:30 P.M.