

Cuyahoga Falls City Council
Minutes of the Public Affairs Meeting
December 3, 2007

Members: Debbie Ritzinger, Chair
Diana Colavecchio
Doug Flinn

Mrs. Ritzinger called the meeting to order at 6:40 p.m. All members were present.

The minutes from the October 1, 2007 and October 15, 2007 committee meetings were approved as submitted.

Legislation Held:

None

Legislation Considered

Sub. Temp. Ord. B-153 (dated 11/30/07)

An ordinance enacting Section 141.011 of the codified ordinances and declaring an emergency.

Mr. Arrington stated the substitute was in response to comments made by Mrs. Klinger. He had nothing further to add to what was said two weeks ago.

Cecilia Cannizzaro, 1925 9th Street, stated she was confused about the issue at hand. Mrs. Ritzinger responded this ordinance is one that was discussed two weeks ago and would be to change the structure of Parks & Rec. Ms. Cannizzaro stated there were quite a few derogatory remarks made about existing board members. It was common practice for many boards to be made up of volunteers. If the Mayor did not like the job that was being done, why did he reappoint members. Three of five members were appointed by the Mayor. The Board wanted someone with park experience and Administration wanted someone to pay attention to how money was being spent. She believes this issue needs more review and both sides should work through the issues before making drastic changes. It is important to have stability if Parks & Rec is the largest employer and not subject it to politics which can change with each change of Mayor.

Dick Sebastian, 2239 19th Street, has been a Board member for eight years and is the most recent member appointed to the Board. He's had lengthy discussions with several members of Council and commends them for their due diligence. He said duties of Board members include approving rates and fee structures, hiring individuals to act as superintendent, meet monthly, and make recommendations to Board of Control for items to be purchased. In October of this year, Parks & Rec conducted a formal written performance evaluation. He was extremely uncomfortable because Board members are only with the superintendent about 1-1/2 hours a month. That hardly seems adequate to make an assessment of the person who supervises a multimillion dollar business. Over the past 50 to 60 years, the City had three superintendents. For the last 2-1/2 years, there have been two. Employee morale is what it should be given the prior history. The department has grown from almost nothing to what it is today – a \$30 million budget with four multi-million dollar businesses. The superintendent has weekly meetings with the Mayor and other cabinet members. But this position technically reports to another body and is not under

the supervision of the person who leads the committee. It would be difficult to supervise an individual who is a key member on staff but is hired by and reports to someone else. It would be difficult to approach that individual.

Darrel Rowh, 2280 Hillside Street, has lived in this city for 47 years. He wants someone in that position who has the ability and experience to run Park & Rec and the senior citizen programs. He understands that the Mayor's appointments come to Council for approval. He stated it upsets him to think that an individual could be hired who would have no recreation experience whatsoever. He feels Council should have input on who is appointed to Parks & Rec and that that individual has the ability and experience as opposed to someone being appointed because he is someone else's friend. When election time comes around, voters can replace the Mayor and superintendent.

Hugh Kleasen, 1947 18th Street, is fully in favor of this legislation and is behind the Mayor. He had written a letter about Babb Run and wanted to know why it was not being taken care of. The Mayor sent a reply explaining that it would be taken care of in the latter part of 2007. Parks & Rec had it on their program to do but it is still not taken care of. He stated he agrees with some of the speakers that Parks & Rec is not the same as we have experienced over the past many years. He believes there needs to be more control over the department since it has grown to what it is.

Mayor Robart commented on what he felt the underlying theme is regarding the seniors. The rumor that was started about closing or limiting or reducing Quirk is totally false. He does not know where it started. His administration is constantly evaluating programs and looking at ways of adding things to Quirk. There is nothing in this ordinance leading anyone to believe they are doing anything against Quirk.

Carolyn Shroyer, 1562 Ruth Avenue, stated when they hired the current superintendent about a year ago, they had a lot of discussions with the Mayor and cabinet. She thought they came to an agreement and it concerns her now as to why procedures are being changed. At that time, they agreed on this person. It was not just the Parks and Rec Board. She acknowledged there were some disagreements but the decision was made together as to who to hire.

CJ Raines, Portage Trail, stated she would like to hear what the ordinance says and how it is stated in lay terms. Mr. Arrington stated what the ordinance would say is that the Parks & Rec superintendent would be appointed by the Mayor subject to confirmation by City Council. There have been a lot of comments made about the Mayor changing someone based on politics. The City of Cuyahoga Falls has a strong form of government. Because of this, it is absolutely essential that the Mayor's top departmental superintendents be in sync with him. We have been very fortunate in the past that the superintendents were in sync. It is essential that the Parks & Rec superintendent also be in sync. Every one of those at the rail has to perform their job to the Mayor's satisfaction or they are out. He stated there were two issues brought up tonight. One is the process and one is the performance. None of the comments he made last week were intended to be derogatory to the Board. They are not talking about people or individuals—they are talking about the process. The mere fact that there could have been disagreements between the Mayor and Park Board concerns him. A year ago when Parks & Rec was looking for a new superintendent, it was their belief they should have someone with a recreational background and Administration felt it should be someone with an administrative background. We expressed that to the Board and the Board did not accept it. So, qualifications all dealt with a recreational background. They agreed on an individual that was from a pool of qualified individuals. They did not agree on background. This is not about the current superintendent. This is about the process. Parks and Rec is funded totally under the General Fund just like all other departments.

Mrs. Shroyer stated as a Board member they agree that the Natatorium needed a financial person and she is sure all of Council is aware of who is running the Nat at this point in time and it is not the Park & Rec Board. The Mayor has appointed Bill Lohan to run it. He comes to Park & Rec meetings. The Park & Rec Board is cooperating with the Mayor and cabinet along these lines. They are more than willing to cooperate with a financial person because they do not have that background. But there is more to it than just a financial side. She asked Council to please consider a combination but not a complete mayoral representation.

Mrs. Cannizzaro stated she discussed her concerns with the Mayor about the rumors. Her concern was about running it as a business. They spoke about comments made by other Board members feeling uncomfortable giving evaluations to someone who they did not fully supervise. She did not understand it. Parks & Rec is too important to have a total business person. You cannot totally take away the personal side because you are dealing with people. She wanted to make sure Council kept that in mind. She does not see Park & Rec as a business.

Karen Nelsch, 2545 North Haven, has heard a lot today about this ordinance taking away the voice of the people in running the parks. The entire City is responsive to the people. We have snow plowing for senior citizens. The Mayor listens to what the seniors want. If he makes too many of them unhappy, they won't re-elect him the next time. Cuyahoga Falls cares about its people and gives as many services as possible. If the Park Department is under the Mayor, it will still continue all of the services.

Mr. Gorbach thanked everyone for coming. He stated this is a big departure from what we have had up until this point, and at some point Council needs to make a decision. He requested the legislation be held until budgets were completed so he would have more time to devote to this issue.

Mrs. Pyke stated she didn't understand why the qualifications didn't include any park background. She asked if the legislation was the same as the previous draft only with the requirement of a business background? Mr. Arrington stated Mrs. Carr did a lot of work researching the qualifications. She looked at what other businesses of this type look for in a manager. They are looking for someone with a business background. Mrs. Pyke asked if Administration doesn't see any need for this person to have park background. Mrs. Carr stated this was simply to address some requests given at the last meeting. She said there was no specific degree in a sense. The individual could actually have a variety of degrees. Mrs. Klinger asked them to put something down with regard to having a business background and Administration agreed there is a strong need for business course work. The backgrounds at the rail, for example, are quite a variety. Also, customer service is extremely important so that would be something else they would want. You can't run it totally as a business. You need someone not only for profit but also to balance all of those problems. She looked at other positions that would be an enterprise and also recreation related and came up with someone running a hotel or golf course. There isn't a specific degree but more it is the background being looked at. Mrs. Pyke stated there was nothing in the ordinance that stated they wanted a person who worked in parks or in recreation. Mrs. Carr stated you need to be careful. Bob Leonard is a very strong manager. He started as fire chief and is now running the sanitation department. You need to be able to run something from a business standpoint. This was the first attempt trying to satisfy comments made at the last meeting.

Mr. Flinn asked what would happen to the Parks and Rec Board. Mr. Virgil stated nothing would happen to it. The Board's job would be to continue to set park policy, establish fees for programs, run the parks themselves...many of the things they are currently doing. Many cities keep their Parks and Rec boards in an advisory capacity. Mr. Flinn asked when the Board was first started in the 50s whether they had to get their own money. Mr. Arrington stated at one point there was a park levy voted by the people and that was how the Park Board was established. The wages were paid by the City but the Board ran its program

by the levy. The program was to provide a quality of life to the community and run the parks successfully. At some point, the park levy is gone and a portion of the income tax money that comes in is set aside for the parks. It is funded through the income tax and not through a park levy. Mr. Flinn stated that money was part of the vote and it would be set aside for Park & Rec operations, and now the department has grown significantly. He wondered if there was a compromise. They have taken on projects within the Parks & Rec that were actually businesses, such as the golf course. Over the years the department has grown but has turned itself into running businesses instead of running the parks. He suggested taking all of the enterprise funds under Park and Rec and put them under another Division's responsibilities. In other words, take the business side out of Park & Rec and let it continue to run the way it used to run and did so successfully. The compromise might be to separate out the enterprise funds and have a financial person run those businesses and keep Park & Rec running on its own. Mr. Arrington stated that was suggested a couple of weeks ago. If we split it off, there will be a duplication of personnel that would actually cost the City money. Mr. Flinn stated since the set-up of the Board was approved by the voters 54 years ago, he wondered if this change shouldn't be on the ballot in November. Mr. Arrington indicated that the language in the Charter states that the Board has all powers and duties unless or until otherwise changed by ordinance. If enough of the electorate was not satisfied with the ordinance, they have the right of referendum to put it on the ballot.

Mrs. Hummel agreed with Mr. Gorbach that there is too much going on to make a decision right now and would like to hold this. She stated that Mr. Arrington made reference to some internal discussions in response to Mr. Flinn's comment about splitting some of the Park Board's responsibilities. She asked if there have been free-flowing discussions between the Board and Administration prior to this legislation being introduced and asked if there was some ground where there might be compromise. Mr. Arrington stated there have been no formal or informal discussions with the Park Board. They brought what they felt was in the best interest of the City. Mrs. Hummel stated she is not ready to make a decision on this. She was disappointed there were no discussions whether public or private at a Park Board meeting or open forum.

Mrs. Klinger stated with what she has heard this evening, it would be time to put together a summary of suggestions showing something structured the way Doug suggests, what administration suggests and showing the issues that administration is trying to address specifically, as well as other issues discussed, and then bring the summary back in January. Council is working on budgets. This is a big change for the City and for this body and we need to take the time to do it and do it right.

The Committee recommended holding Sub. Temp. Ord. B-153.

The meeting adjourned at 8:10 p.m.