

Session 14-11 a Special Meeting of the Parks and Recreation Advisory Commission was called to order on November 6, 2014 at 5:30 pm by Chair Matt Steffy at the Cowles Council Chambers City Hall located at 491 E. Pioneer Avenue, Homer, Alaska.

PRESENT: COMMISSIONERS LOWNEY, ARCHIBALD, STEFFY, MACCAMPBELL, BRANN AND LILLIBRIDGE

STUDENT REP: PEDRO OCHOA

ABSENT: COMMISSIONER ROEDL (EXCUSED)

STAFF: MARK ROBL, CHIEF OF POLICE
JULIE ENGBRETSSEN, DEPUTY CITY PLANNER
RENEE KRAUSE, CMC, DEPUTY CITY CLERK

APPROVAL OF THE AGENDA

The agenda was approved by consensus of the Commission.

PUBLIC COMMENT ON ITEMS ALREADY ON THE AGENDA

There were fourteen who testified on the vehicular damage being done to the beach and slough vegetation and bird habitat, future erosion issues, unlawful acts from noise to illegal drinking and drug use, trespassing and damage to private property, and too much dog feces and unleashed pets, on or around Bishops Beach and the park in Old Town Homer. There were many who advocated that it may be time to close the beach to vehicles for the safety of people and the future of the beach.

VISITORS

A. Marianne Aplin, U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service, Manager, Islands and Ocean Visitor Center

Ms. Aplin recognized previous efforts to change behaviors on the beach but they would like to work in partnership with the city in addressing some of those behaviors that also include educational aspects. She noted the physical barriers put up by one resident and the resulting increase in vegetation on their property. Ms. Aplin pointed out that she did not like those barriers when the property owners installed them but seeing the increase in the vegetation makes her appreciate those efforts more. Ms. Aplin also noted the Beach Policy while wonderful is not enforceable and due to the lack of appropriate staff any new regulations would still be hard to enforce. The Visitors Center was not a part of the first committees that worked on the Beach Policy but the city has the U.S. Fish & Wildlife's attention now and definitely 133 bird species gets their attention. The Visitor Center is an administrative site for the Refuge which covers from the tip of the Aleutians across the Gulf of Alaska up to the Chukchi Sea so they do not do monitoring. There are very active groups regarding birding plus the Kachemak Bay Research Reserve which does some monitoring in the bay.

There were brief comment from the commission regarding participation in the very first committee in 2001 and Ms. Aplin responded to questions regarding statistics on visitors needing assistance. They have had a few but the most popular activities are walks along the beach which is hard to do dodging vehicles.

Commissioner Lillibridge kept bringing focus to the increase in incidents that required police intervention.

Ms. Aplin also did not advocate for installing more lighting especially since they have such extended daylight in the summer months.

Commissioner Archibald inquired about the amount of resources that they could expect from US Fish & Wildlife regarding protecting the storm berm and signage. Ms. Aplin responded with example of the Beluga Slough Trail rehabilitation and would definitely be willing to work with the city regarding education. She also reported seeing people training their dogs in the slough which they would like to see stop as soon as possible.

RECONSIDERATION

There were no items for reconsideration.

ADOPTION OF THE CONSENT AGENDA

A. Minutes for the regular meeting of September 18, 2014

Chair Steffy requested a motion for adoption of the consent agenda.

LILLIBRIDGE/MACCAMPBELL - MOVED TO ADOPT THE CONSENT AGENDA.

There was no discussion.

VOTE. YES. NON-OBJECTION. UNANIMOUS CONSENT.

Motion carried.

STAFF & COUNCIL REPORTS/COMMITTEE REPORTS/BOROUGH REPORTS

Ms. Engebretsen reminded the commission on the upcoming P.A.R.C Open House next Thursday at 6:00-8:00 p.m. at Islands and Ocean Visitor Center.

PUBLIC HEARING

There were no items scheduled for this meeting.

PENDING BUSINESS

A. Memorandum from Deputy City Planner re: Bishops Beach Issues

Ms. Engebretsen provided a brief direction and outcome that came from the worksession held on October 16, 2014. She recommended that they can work on this through the commission, hold a couple of public hearings on proposed changes to the Beach Policy or the commission could recommend establishing a committee or task force to work on the issues for a few months and submit the recommendations to the Commission which could then forward the recommended changes to Council for approval.

Commissioner Lowney moved that they recommend working on the changes to the Beach Policy to address issues happening at Bishops Beach. She did not want to push the issue around but to deal with it. She also wanted to strike the Improve lighting from the recommendations in the memorandum. Commissioner Lillibridge seconded that motion.

Commissioner Brann supported that direction but wanted to form a task force to come up with recommendations for Bishops Beach, he believed it was the critical area, and maybe add Mariner Park since there are some problems there too.

Commissioner MacCampbell wanted to include Mud Bay and felt that some of the solutions for Bishops Beach would address Mud Bay too.

Commissioner Lowney agreed with those statements but in her opinion Mud Bay was not as critical.

Commissioner Archibald advocated for reviewing the whole Beach Policy and reviewing all the areas that required it especially those sections that would directly affect Bishops Beach, and other beaches.

Chair Steffy liked the idea of reviewing the whole policy but focusing on the Bishops Beach area. He inquired if they needed a formal motion.

There was direction from staff that the commission needs to determine exactly what they want the task force to do and who they want on the task force in order to provide Council with a good reason for creation of a task force.

The commissioners discussed at length the pros and cons of reviewing and changing specific areas of the Beach Policy as it effects Bishops Beach, including additional areas that have similar uses and problems or the whole policy.

LOWNEY/LILLIBRIDGE - MOVED TO CREATE A TASK FORCE TO REVIEW AND UPDATE THE BEACH POLICY TO ADDRESS ISSUES THAT AFFECT BISHOPS BEACH.

There was additional discussion on various aspects for reasons not to review the whole policy and why the focus should be only on Bishops Beach with a caveat of addressing vehicular use on additional beaches such as Mariner Park and along the spit. The concern was if you blocked vehicles from Bishops Beach they are going to have problems on other beaches. It was remarked that they did not want to become Southcentral Alaska Recreational Area for Off Road vehicles. Further clarification was attempted by the Chair on the motion to create the task force and what they were tasked to do. There was still hesitation from the commission on including the whole beach policy or just sections that applied to the issues at Bishops Beach.

Commissioner Lillibridge advocated for collecting data on the vehicular use of the beach. She reported her experience with city parks and beaches in Florida on a recent vacation. She also noted that people in Homer may enjoy their free style of living but when those lifestyles infringe upon others then it is time to restrict the uses.

Commissioner Archibald stated that he knows if they close Bishops Beach then those people will go to other areas and he doesn't want that to happen.

Commissioner MacCampbell pointed out that there are limited accesses to the beaches but that they must protect that berm. He went on to cite the accesses in Ninilchik, Whiskey Gulch, Anchor Point and sending the behaviors up the road.

Commissioner Lowney further advocated on points in dealing with one beach at a time and that they can wait to address the next areas.

Commissioner Brann commented on the historical discussions that took place in the earlier Beach Committees regarding pedestrian priority and the value establishing then the absolute demarcation for vehicles.

Further comments and responses agreed with the eventual follow-up of the other beaches, the negative NO signage in other cities, giving the police department something that they can enforce, the benefits that the habitat provides for users who use the beach appropriately. Additional examples of instances where inappropriate behavior was conducted alongside lawful behavior was given by commissioners.

STEFFY/BRANN - MOVED THAT IN LIGHT OF THE CONCERNS BROUGHT TO THE COMMISSION FOR THE INCREASED ACTIVITIES AND ISSUES ON BISHOPS BEACH AND THE IMPACT ON THE PEOPLE OF HOMER THE PARKS AND RECREATION ADVISORY COMMISSION WOULD LIKE TO FORM A TASK FORCE TO REVIEW THE BEACH POLICY AND MAKE RECOMMENDATIONS TO ADDRESS THESE ISSUES FOR BISHOPS BEACH AND LIKE OR SIMILAR AREAS.

Commissioner Lillibridge asked if Chief Robl could respond in regards to the motion and the issues that have been brought up. She wanted the wording of the motion to be specific to Homer. Chair Steffy responded regarding enforcement. Staff recommended passing the motion then they can discuss framing what they want the task force to accomplish and the time frame.

Commissioner Lillibridge requested the motion to be read back from the clerk. Due to all the changes and suggestions the clerk was unable to read the motion. Ms. Krause stated that the commission wanted the Beach Policies amended to address the issues at Bishops Beach. There were commissioners who also wanted to amend the policies to cover additional areas where the same activities occur. Ms. Krause then stated the motion could be simplified to read as follows:

MOVED TO REQUEST COUNCIL FORM A TASK FORCE TO REVIEW THE BEACH POLICY AS IT APPLIES TO THE ISSUES AT BISHOPS BEACH AND LIKE OR SIMILAR AREAS OR PLACES.

Chair Steffy and Commissioner Archibald moved and seconded that motion as stated by staff.

There was no further discussion.

VOTE. YES. LILLIBRIDGE, BRANN, STEFFY, MACCAMPBELL, LOWNEY, ARCHIBALD.

Motion carried.

The Commissioners agreed that they would like to see a member of council, the Chief of Police or his representative, a Parks and Recreation commissioner, a resident or adjacent property owner, a business owner from Old Town area of Homer, a birder, and a non-resident user on the task force.

The commission would like to have the Task Force bring back recommendations and amendments by or before May 10, 2015. They can invite a member of the US Fish and Wildlife and the Research Reserve as expert testimony.

There was additional discussion regarding the task force would not report to the commission but to the Council. The commission would be represented by the Commissioner appointed to the Task Force.

NEW BUSINESS

A. Memorandum from the City Clerk re: 2015 Regular Meeting Schedule

Chair Steffy stated he would entertain a motion approving the schedule.

MACCAMPBELL/LOWNEY - MOVED TO APPROVE THE 2015 REGULAR MEETING SCHEDULE AS PRESENTED IN THE MEMORANDUM FROM THE CITY CLERK.

There was no discussion.

VOTE. YES. LOWNEY, MACCAMPBELL, STEFFY, BRANN, LILLIBRIDGE AND ARCHIBALD

Motion carried.

INFORMATIONAL MATERIALS

- A. Commission Annual Calendar
- B. Commissioner Attendance Schedule at Council Meeting

There was no discussion or comments on the informational materials.

COMMENTS OF THE AUDIENCE

Roberta Highland commented that the formation of the task force will remove control of the decisions from the commission. She emphasized that the Council does listen to the commissions and their recommendations. Ms. Highland also noted that she did not comment on other beach issues since this meeting was focused on Bishop's Beach. She would be interested to know the number of calls the police receive issues at Mariner Park. The only reason they have the number of calls for Bishops Beach is that a group was formed by residents and thank goodness that they did get organized. There are some good ideas like closing the east end portion of the beach and putting barriers up and getting dogs on leashes that will help.

COMMENTS OF THE CITY STAFF

Ms. Engebretsen commented that things are going well with the needs assessment and she should have more information and will include information from the meeting next week for the next regular meeting. There will be a formal presentation at the November 24, 2014 Council meeting. There is a Public Safety Building meeting on Monday the 10th at 5:30. The meeting at the Visitors Center is from 6-8 p.m. next Thursday the 13th. She has been very busy with all the different focus groups.

Ms. Krause will check with the City Clerk regarding getting the request for the Task Force before Council on the 24th.

COMMENTS OF THE COUNCILMEMBER *(If one is present)*

There were no council members present.

COMMENTS OF THE COMMISSION

Commissioner Lillibridge commented that she had decided to resign from the commission but with this issue of Bishop's Beach on the table now she wanted to see this through so she was going to stay on and informed Ms. Krause that she was withdrawing her resignation. She tried to get one or two comments from everyone who spoke tonight. She will also be at the next Council meeting.

Commissioner Brann commented on the other Beach Task Force and that it was a long drawn out process due to several opposite opinions but believe it is critical to getting Bishop's Beach addressed and it is time again to review the policy.

Student Commissioner Ochoa commented that he was going to recommend no vehicles on the beach but it appeared that the commission had it under control. he further commented on the size of the vehicles and not seeing some of the little kids. He would hate to see someone seriously injured or worse.

Commissioner MacCampbell stated that it is resolvable and you have to get the public in three ways with good interpretative signage and also what they cannot do, there is no need to have a uniform sitting down there but you need to let them know what you can and cannot do. They can move logs to block access and post signs; he further noted that the current Beach Policy document is nice but it does lack teeth. He thanked Renee he knows she puts in a lot hours and does a lot for them and Julie, thank you for everything that is put in the packet for them.

Commissioner Lowney stated that the Council meeting of the 24th will also have the Woodard Creek presentation so there will be a lot that night; she hoped that what they did tonight is dealing with the issues appropriately; even if what they put teeth into Chief Robl will probably be unable to do anything anyway and she is ready to see that beach closed; she is a frequent visitor to that beach and even today with only 10 feet of beach they ended up in the water because a truck was headed right towards them, but then another truck came in and spun out right there in the lower parking area.

Commissioner Archibald hopes it works out as they envision. Thanks to staff. He did note that at the worksession they suggested putting a gate and limiting hours because unless they increase the police budget there is not much they can do.

COMMENTS OF THE CHAIR

Chair Steffy stated that it will be interesting to watch and learn since he does not have much experience with this side of the bay and does not visit that park or beach. He related some experiences with parks and limiting access to certain areas using time frames and gates. He believes that education can go a long ways. He appreciated everyone getting in an extra meeting in this month and thanked the staff also for everything they do.

ADJOURNMENT

There being no further business to come before the Commission, Chair Steffy adjourned the meeting at 7:52 p.m. The next **REGULAR MEETING IS SCHEDULED FOR THURSDAY NOVEMBER 20, 2014** at 5:30 p.m. at City Hall Cowles Council Chambers 491 E. Pioneer Avenue, Homer, Alaska.

Renee Krause, CMC, Deputy City Clerk I

Approved: _____