

**PARKS AND RECREATION COMMISSION
VIRTUAL MEETING MINUTES
JULY 22, 2020**

I. CALL TO ORDER

The meeting was called to order by Chairman Yon at 7:05 p.m.

II. ATTENDANCE

Present: Mark Yon, S. Joseph Jablonski, Mary Lasher, Shamus Petrucelli, Matthew DiGirolamo, Michael Veltri

Absent: Mary Lee Mahon

Staff: Julie A. Jakubec, CPA, CGMA, Township Manager; Cathy Bubas, Manager's Secretary

III. MINUTES

A. June 24, 2020

Approval of the subject minutes was deferred to the August meeting since they were not completed.

IV. NEW BUSINESS

A. Discussion Considering Possible Name Change of Squaw Valley Park

Chairman Yon acknowledged prevailing issues with the name of the park. He explained the Parks and Recreation Commission is comprised of resident volunteers that are not compensated for their time. The Commission is an advisory board and makes recommendations to Council for consideration. He could not make a recommendation regarding the name of Squaw Valley Park at this time. He recalled the long tradition of open Town Hall Meetings for people to be able to participate in person. The Covid-19 Pandemic precludes that from happening now. Chairman Yon suggested the Parks and Recreation Commission review the issue over the coming months. He acknowledged representatives of the Council of Three Rivers American Indian Center were in attendance via Zoom, and indicated they would be invited back along with more people to speak when they are able to meet in person. He noted a lot of residents are not tech savvy.

Chairman Yon requested members of the Commission to comment prior to receiving comments from the audience.

Mr. Jablonski was opposed to erasing the history of this country; Mr. Petrucelli felt strongly about researching the park name, noting a legend associated with the park, and suggested continuing conversations with the Council of Three Rivers American Indian Center and research to collect all the facts before making a decision for Council's consideration; Ms. Lasher was neutral, and suggested sending a survey to the Township residents and analyze the results; Mr. Veltri recommended keeping an open mind and doing some research before making a decision; Mr.

DiGirolamo was surprised to learn the term ‘squaw’ is derogatory, and supported changing the name of the park to something everyone is comfortable with.

Chairman Yon requested comments from the audience.

Mr. Miguel Sague, member of the Board of Directors of the Council of Three Rivers American Indian Center, noted the names ‘Squaw Run’ and ‘Squaw Valley’ are pertinent because they are names in the region. He explained the immigrants coming to the United States were stigmatized by the languages. He stated ‘squaw’ is not a legitimate name of this region. It is a name created by non-native people for a female Indian and is a slur. The myth about Guyasuta’s daughter is a myth.

Ms. Amulya Garimella noted the research has been done by the Council of Three Rivers American Indian Center. Since the meetings are on the web more people can attend. Public interest is at an all-time high. She supports changing the park name, as ‘squaw’ is a racial and sexual slur and the fact that people do not know this does not mean that it isn’t. The cost to change the name will be negligible.

Chairman Yon stated in his 18 years serving on the Parks and Recreation Commission no one ever complained about the park name.

Ms. Garimella asked the Commission to take into account the current civil rights movement, noting now is the best strategic time to propose changing the park name.

Ms. Amy Horn stated in 1969 she was an Interpreter Naturalist under Beulah Frey. Ms. Horn stated Ms. Frey knew the history of the area going back 300 years. That valley was home to many Indian tribes. When times got tough the Indians would go into Squaw Valley caves. She recalled the history of a woman named Massey Harbison, who was kidnapped by Indians and they killed two of her children. She escaped from Butler to Squaw Run, to the river, where three men took her to Fort Pitt. Ms. Horn stated the recent Civil Rights movement has involved tearing down monuments and the killing of people and Police. She agreed that Black Lives do Matter, but the movement is Marxist. Everyone was upset about what happened to George Floyd, which she believed spurred the movement to change the park name, to which she is opposed.

Mr. Jablonski stated Parks and Recreation Commission Member Mary Lee Mahon was on the phone and wants to speak, but she could not be heard due to technical difficulty.

Ms. Edith Cook, a recently elected Public Official, commended the Commission for working to include the views of all the people in attendance. She loves the park and considers it an asset to the community. Ms. Cook provided insight to the role of Public Officials and volunteers. Though Public Officials represent the public, they are not to make decisions on behalf of a majority of opinion, but rather based on the welfare of the community, and sometimes decisions are based on how things impact a minority group. You do what is best.

Ms. Ann Sokalski, an O’Hara Township resident, stated she supports the removal of ‘squaw’ from the park name. In explaining to her son why people want to change the name, he asked why would people not want to change it if it hurts people. She recommended not dragging this out and decide on a name later.

Ms. Sharon Shepard stated there are more important things to be considered than the name of a park, like flooding, and kids getting back to school. We need to spend our tax dollars on getting these sewers fixed and helping the residents.

Mr. Ilya Goldin noted the current name of the park may impose significant cost to the Township, whether we know rightly or wrongly, that the name is offensive. It may dissuade people or businesses from moving into the Township or hosting public events, resulting in lost revenue.

Ms. Michelle Leonard stated everyone now knows ‘squaw’ is an offensive slur. She noted there are lots of missing Indian women throughout the United States. She empathized with the woman experiencing storm water runoff and other environmental issues and suggested a scale of importance. Ms. Leonard stated the ‘wanna be’ tribes do not speak for those who are real Native women. She indicated whether the park name is changed, or not, you cannot say you do not know what it means and how hurtful it is.

Ms. Melissa Compton explained she started the petition using a Google form and included the yes/no option on the question ‘Do you support the removal of the name “squaw”’. Those who opposed the removal were creating fake emails to boost the ‘no’s’ so she removed the ‘no’ option from the petition. The petition has been handed over to the Commission and Council and no answers were changed. The results are as follows: 1,155 support the name change of which 211 are O’Hara Township residents, and 700 are from Allegheny County. Ms. Compton noted the story of women who hid in Squaw Valley while the men went out and would love to hear about it. She also suggested a possible name for the park.

Mr. Jablonski questioned why people from outside of O’Hara Township have a say on a petition. It is O’Hara Township’s park.

Chairman Yon acknowledged lots of good information received. He noted an overwhelming request to change the park name, and not as much to not change the name, possibly due to technology or older residents are not aware. He did not feel a compelling rush to change the park name, and felt it would be best to get people in a room and hear everybody. If the Commission feels the park name should be changed, they can discuss options.

Mr. Petrucelli stated in light of all the pros and cons, he would like the Commission to discuss a place holder name. In lieu of ‘Squaw’ it could be called O’Hara Valley Park until the Commission can follow up with more prudent research, internal discussion and a recommendation to Council. Chairman Yon thought that was putting the cart before the horse, but could be considered in the coming meetings.

Manager Jakubec noted other people wish to speak and encouraged them to email her and she would forward to the Commission and Council. She indicated there are options of things that could be done in the park, such as a history plaque. The Manager stated the next Parks and Recreation Commission meeting is August 26, 2020. She also stated Council would consider any recommendation from the Commission.

Chairman Yon indicated it would be more of an internal discussion about what the Commission needs to do. It is something that needs extensive discussion. He acknowledged people have strong opinions and the interest level is high. He did not feel a need to act on anything tonight in their

advisory capacity. If there is something of an urgent nature, the elected Council will have to pick up on it. Chairman Yon stated he is a firm believer in the open Democratic process and letting everyone state their case. He recalled the ALS proposal for the baseball field and how the Commission viewed it in its entirety. He indicated the Commission will decide at the next meeting how to move forward. He thanked all those in attendance and those who participated in the discussion.

Mr. John Denny, Jr., a Council Member, noted Council has never had 100 people at a meeting, and this is a big audience.

B. Discussion of Proposal for Field Maintenance at Beulah Frey Soccer Field

Manager Jakubec referred to a proposal for fall maintenance of the soccer field. She asked the contractor that mows the field to mow it to the specifications requested. She explained there is a certain way to maintain the field to reduce morning fog.

Mr. Petrucelli would like the Soccer Association to attend a meeting to discuss why and the long and short-term benefits.

C. Update on Parks relative to COVID-19

Manager Jakubec stated all parks are open with the exception of the shelters and restrooms. Additional signage was posted asking visitors to wear face covers in accordance with the Health Department Secretary's recommendation. She continues to monitor the daily case numbers. If the numbers drop she would consider opening the shelters, but not the restrooms. The restrooms cannot be sanitized as much as recommended.

V. OTHER BUSINESS

None.

VI. COMMENTS CONCERNING NON-AGENDA ITEMS

None.

VII. COMMISSION COMMENTS OR CONCERNS

Mr. DiGirolamo noted seeing more needles in the trash and in Woodland Park. The Manager stated she would notify the police immediately to increase patrols.

Chairman Yon indicated the Commission would continue communications and try to form a game plan at the next meeting, and let people speak at an open forum.

VIII. STAFF CONCERNS

Manager Jakubec encouraged anyone with comments to email her and she would forward to the Parks and Recreation Commission. The August meeting will be conducted via Zoom and

information to participate will be posted to the Township website and Facebook. The recorded meeting will also be posted when available.

IX. ADJOURNMENT

Motion by Mr. Petrucelli to adjourn the meeting was seconded by Mr. Jablonski and carried unanimously. The meeting adjourned at 8:25 p.m.

Cathy Bubas, Manager's Secretary

Attachment: Participant List