

Meeting Minutes
Fairview Park Board
Jan. 7, 2013

Board members present: Chairwoman Beverly Totty, Vice-Chairman Jack Cannon, Bob Benson, Secretary Richard Edmondson, Neil Rice, Samantha Towler, plus Park Superintendent Keith Paisley

Absent: Patti Carroll, Mark Dietze,

Also present: City Manager Andrew Hyatt, State Forester Dwight Barnett, and members of the Friends of Bowie Park

- I. Meeting was called to order by Chairwoman Totty. The agenda was approved. The minutes from the 12-3-12 meeting were also approved.
- II. General park updates were given by Paisley, who reported a sharp increase in the number of people attending formal park programs. In 2011, park programs were attended by 6,183 participants, whereas in 2012, the number rose to 9,098. He said Park Programs Director Jenny Herrera has been instrumental in helping to make the programs more popular.
- III. Old business—tree thinning: A presentation was given by Barnett on the best way to proceed with regard to thinning pine tree stands in Bowie Park. He handed out two maps, showing areas to be thinned, one of which includes the total acreage of sections to be targeted initially. He said he would mark the trees to be cut, and then the trees would be thinned from a 120-180 basal area, down to a healthy 60 basal. This will reduce the threat of a pine beetle outbreak. There is no market for pulp wood presently, so the trunks of the trees would be left to lie where they fall, however, limbs and branches would be removed and burned to reduce possible fire hazard. He advocated a conservative approach, starting with the smallest section shown on the map, a plot of 1.8 acres. In addition to cutting the trees, invasive plant species will have to be eradicated, and native species planted. He also recommended the trees be felled by a professional timber cutter. “We’ll probably learn a lot of lessons on how to do it, the first time around, and then we can move up, north, to the next unit, which will be 2.6 acres, and then over to 3.2 acres, and over to the 4.8, the 4.1, and finally the 2.1 would be my recommendation.” He said the plots would be thinned, and re-planted, at a rate of about one per year. He also recommended that on the first plot—the 1.8 acre section—the trees should be thinned at varying densities in different areas of the plot. This will help determine how best to proceed in the successive sections.

Benson asked about the advisability of starting slow in light of the danger of a pine beetle outbreak, and would it not be safer to proceed faster? Barnett replied that proceeding faster reduces the threat from the pine beetle, but increases the risk of invasive exotics taking over. Cannon then expressed concern about the fire risk, and suggested that moving faster might reduce the possibility of a fire. “Well again, that is a calculated risk,” Barnett replied. “We don’t know how many acres we can thin *and* preventively treat for invasive exotics.” He said

another factor is budget—how much can the city afford to spend over the next five years to thin and treat these areas? Can it afford to take the faster route, or is the conservative approach more in keeping with city budgetary constraints? He added:

“I would guess that since the area acreage of pine in Tennessee has been vastly depleted by the huge outbreak (of pine beetles) in 2000, I would guess that we’ve got a pretty good chance of skating through the next five years without a beetle outbreak unless we get some more devastating summers, you know, 110 degree weather and drought. And I would say maybe the chances of that are pretty good, of getting that kind of weather. What I would do is I would real soon get bids, and get the operators up here and have me mark it, first of all, and do the 1.8 acres and see how fast it goes, see what it looks like, see how much time it takes to lop and pile the slash—that’s going to be a job...See there’s too many unknowns right now

Edmondson said he thought that was a good idea, and that the city should follow Barnett’s recommendation. Cannon asked if it would be possible to chip, rather than burn, the branches from the downed trees. Barnett said that would be possible too. Cannon also asked about whether there should be a controlled burn following the cutting, and whether this could be the method for getting rid of the invasive exotics. Barnett said this could be done “if you’ve got enough fuel on the ground to burn, and if you’ve got some things you want to get rid of.” Cannon asked if it would be Barnett’s recommendation to do this. Barnett advised against it because the effects of the fire could depend on a number of variables including the soil and the temperature. Controlled burns would be a good thing to do in the future, he added, but not on the initial area to be thinned. He said that in most of the areas to be thinned, approximately 20-30 trees per acre would need to be cut.

Totty asked if the exotic invasives can be better controlled by being more “aggressive”? Barnett replied:

Well, if exotics get into an area and get the light conditions—all of them depend on a lot of sunlight—then you can have an explosive growth. Like bush honeysuckle—it’s already there in the pine straw. I think what Mike is thinking is that we don’t want that to be an open seed bed, for these things to be brought in by birds. We’ve had a dense, closed canopy for 50, 60, 70 years? And when that’s changed, what’s on the ground is going to change...Exotic management is easy if you catch it and nip it in the bud, but if you let it go too far, then it gets totally out of control, and it’s hopeless.

Discussion then focused on whether an herbicide like Round-Up could be used. Barnett replied that while some people are opposed to the use of herbicides, he believed this would be one acceptable approach (the other being to remove the exotics from the soil by hand).

Edmondson suggested that since City Arborist Mike Berkley was not present, that it might be good to have Barnett and Berkley have another meeting with each other, discuss the issues, and try and reach a consensus. Cannon said he thought that would be a good idea as well, and

mentioned that “time is of the essence.” It was suggested that Fire Chief Mike Cooper and Park Superintendent Keith Paisley should be present at the meeting also. Edmondson agreed to send out an email to all four participants—Cooper, Paisley, Barnett and Berkley—and try to arrange a time when all can meet together.

IV. Survey results—Totty said the survey results could be divided into four sections or categories—1) items pertaining to the city, 2) those pertaining to the county (such as the county ball park), 3) small things that can be addressed by individual department heads, and 4) camping. She then asked other members of the Board for their thoughts on the survey results.

Edmondson said that some of the suggestions were “very good ideas,” and noted that some, such as installing hitch-rails on the trails where horseback riders could stop and tie their horses, could be implemented with minimal cost. He also said he liked one suggestion to put swings, such as those found on the porches of homes, at Lake Van for people to rock in, noting that this, too, could be achieved for little cost.

Rice said the number of people who responded was “very small,” and that it accounted for “less than five percent” of the population. Also people did not know about the additional parcels the city has designated for park use, he said, and therefore answers tended to be applicable only to Bowie Park. For this reason he said he would be “hesitant about making any decisions” based upon this survey, and recommended doing another survey.

Next to give his thoughts was Benson, who noted that many respondents had expressed the desire to have Bowie Park remain a nature park, and that a number of others had commented on horseback trails—specifically requesting to see trails opened more often, as well as to reopen trails that had been closed in the past.

Cannon, too, noted a number of respondents requesting that trails be opened more often, and suggested the possibility that for now, the city might just focus on one trail, Perimeter Trail, and begin to implement certain trail improvements there such as would enable it to perhaps be reopened sooner following inclement weather. Paisley said this might be possible, but that staffing is “an issue.” Last year the park was closed (to horses and bikes) 129 days, said Paisley, adding that rain fell on 106 of those days. Cannon said Warner Park horse trails are open more frequently than Bowie, and that people are leaving Fairview to go there, and he was only wondering if there was a “compromise” that could be worked out to enable Bowie trails to be open more often. Paisley said choosing the Perimeter Trail, and having it alone opened to bikes and horses, could result in a problem in that some people, once inside the park, might leave the Perimeter and go onto the other trails, even though they were closed.

Cannon said the problems with the park’s trails are due to erosion. Totty said the park needs a trail maintenance plan, and asked Paisley if he could work one up. She said having such a plan in place may make it more likely the city would be able to obtain grants and recruit volunteers. Cannon suggested having a professional trail consultant come and review the problems. He said he would contact a consultant named Bob Richards and obtain a cost estimate.

V. Bowie Park Out Parcel: Totty encouraged all Board members to go to the city's website and review the video of the January 3 meeting in which the out parcel was discussed. The discussion on the matter was described as "insane" by both Totty and Rice. "I wanted it to be said about 50 times, 'it's in the park system,'" said Totty. "Because even though they never voted, they amended my motion. My motion was to allow the Park Board to have approval that the out parcel is part of the park system, for us to discuss the master plan. They amended my motion that they agree that the Park Board can discuss the out parcel and bring forth recommendations of usage—which to me wasn't any different from my motion." She said some commissioners wanted to reserve the out parcel for possible use as a firing range. Rice said he thought that Dr. Evangeline Bowie, upon giving the land to the city, had left stipulations that no firearms were to be allowed, and that to allow a firing range in the out parcel would be inconsistent with her wishes.

VI. Miscellaneous: Paisley said the bids for the widening of Bowie Lake Road would be going out by January 15. Totty said that judging from the survey, there is significant interest in the community garden. The next meeting will be February 4.

VII. Meeting was adjourned.