

# Rancho Simi Recreation and Park District Board of Directors Meeting

## M I N U T E S

**Thursday, August 6, 2020 at 6:30 p.m.**

**Oak Park Community Center  
1000 Kanan Road, Oak Park, CA 91377  
(805) 584-4400 • [www.rsrpd.org](http://www.rsrpd.org)**

**Meeting held via Teleconference**

1. CALL TO ORDER AND PLEDGE OF ALLEGIANCE – Chair Abele called the Meeting to order at 6:30pm. The Pledge of Allegiance was led by Jeannie Liss.
2. ROLL CALL – Directors Freeman, Johnson, O’Brien, Vice Chair Dennert, and Chair Abele were in attendance. Staff in attendance included: Tracy Engel, Jeannie Liss, Wayne Nakaoka, Dan Paranick, Theresa Pennington, Alex Strumfal, and Gina Viecco. Guests included: Jon Watts, Carolyn Cass-Barton, and Sherri Wentworth from the Oak Park Advisory Committee. Members of the Community were in attendance via the Teleconference, those who made comments are listed under the appropriate topic below.
3. AGENDA REVIEW – There were no requested changes to the Agenda.
4. PUBLIC STATEMENTS (ITEMS NOT ON THE AGENDA)

Harry Medved, Member of the Oak Park Advisory Committee reported there is a new volunteer group at Oak Park High School. They are looking to help Seniors during this Pandemic. The student volunteers are matched with a Senior based on shared hobbies or interests and they will participate in a 30-minute phone call together. This has also been reported in the Acorn Oak Park edition today.

Michelle Moutes Gillenwater has lived in Oak Park for 15 years. She is upset about recent changes to the Rancho Simi Pool schedule. She and a group of others have been using the pool to exercise several evenings during the week. Next week there are no lanes available due to the rental of the pool. She doesn't feel this is equitable for the all community members. There is no other option, she would like the schedule changed immediately.

District Manager Dan Paranick asked her to call him directly to discuss the matter further.

Chair Abele inquired if there were any additional comments from the public, no one else spoke up at this time.

### 5. APPROVAL OF MINUTES

- a. Rancho Simi Recreation and Park District Board Meeting – July 16, 2020 – Director Freeman moved to approve the Minutes as written. Director Johnson seconded the motion. The motion carried with a unanimous vote.

## 6. PRESENTATIONS, SCHEDULED ITEMS AND PUBLIC HEARINGS

- a. Presentation of the Part Time Employee of the Month for May 2020 to Courtney Kanagi – The written staff report was submitted by Theresa Pennington, Director of Administration. Courtney is a Park Ranger II and has been with the District for almost 1 year, this is her 1<sup>st</sup> Employee of the Month Award. She was unable to attend the meeting tonight and will be presented with her plaque and check during business hours.
- b. Status of the District's Response to the COVID-19 Coronavirus Pandemic – The Verbal Report was provided by Dan Paranick, District Manager. Some Youth Sports activities will be allowed to resume with social distancing measures. Complaints to the District have reduced in regard to social distancing at local parks. The Recreation Department has done an outstanding job constructing an all-day Club program for students: PAL (Play and Learn). Currently there are 200+ spaces available. The cost will be \$625 per month, a discount is available for families if needed. The opening of this program allows the District to put many District employees back to work.

Director Dennert noted while at the Simi Hills Golf Course, there are patrons not complying with the mask requirement. He suggested management could approach the golfers since the younger employees are not comfortable saying something to the adults.

Chair Abele wanted to clarify Paranick's statement regarding Youth Sports. Paranick responded Youth Baseball and Softball can resume team activity as long as they follow State regulations.

Abele stated he has not participated in the last two County COVID briefings. He did not feel the meetings were being conducted in an efficient manner and they were censoring submitted questions.

Chair Abele inquired if there were any comments from the public, no one spoke up at this time.

- c. Public Hearing on the Rancho Simi Recreation and Park District Annual Budget and Planning and Maintenance Projects for Fiscal year 2020/21 – The Staff Report was presented by Dan Paranick, District Manager. This is the second Public Hearing for the approved Preliminary Budget.

Chair Abele opened the meeting to Public Hearing at 6:52pm. There were no comments from the Public at this time.

There was no action taken by the Board tonight.

## 7. CONSENT AGENDA (Matters listed under the Consent Agenda are considered routine and shall be acted upon without discussion by one motion approving the Consent Agenda. If discussion is desired the item may be removed from the Consent Agenda upon a Director's request.)

- a. Approval of 7/15/20 Accounts Payable Check Register & 7/17/20 Payroll Check Register – Staff responded to questions from the Board. Motion: Director O'Brien moved to approve the Consent Agenda. Director Johnson seconded the motion. The motion carried with a unanimous vote.

Director Freeman noted the Guardian Building was paid-off in this check run. It is a notable accomplishment for the District.

8. CONTINUED BUSINESS – NONE

9. NEW BUSINESS

- a. Consideration of Tree Removal at Mae Boyar Park – The Staff Report was presented by Dan Paranick, District Manager. There are 3 alternatives available to the Board, Paranick summarized the 3 different options presented in this report. The Oak Park Advisory Committee discussed this topic at their last meeting. In a 4 to 2 vote they selected option #3, remove only 1 tree and redesign the play area, as their preference. Staff recommends option #1, remove both trees, repair the playground surface, and add 2 large replacement trees.

O'Brien wanted to clarify if these are both Ash trees, the report lists one as an Oak. Paranick responded they are both Ash trees, the report is incorrect.

Chair Abele asked if there are any historical reasons not to remove the tree and the difference in cost and time. Paranick responded staff cannot find any historical reasons to keep the tree. The cost difference between option 3 and options 1 and 2 is approximately \$37K with 6 months to complete option #3 and a month or less for options #1 or 2.

Freeman asked if there are any funds available. Paranick stated not in the Oak Park Budget, but funds could be shifted from other projects.

O'Brien asked if any Community fundraising options are available. Paranick said it is possible, but this would delay the timeframe and there is never a guarantee of funds with outside fundraisers.

Dennert asked if the Oak Park Advisory Committee is aware funds would be diverted from and postpone an alternate project in Oak Park if this is approved. Paranick responded the Advisory Committee is aware and is willing to defer a parking lot project.

Chair Abele opened the topic to Public Comment.

Jay Kapitz, a former MAC Member on the Oak Park Advisory Board is in support of option #3. He feels this is the reason Oak Park has an advisory committee. Oak Park feels strongly about the trees and he is hoping the Board will listen to the Committee.

Maryann Rush, a longtime resident is in support of option #3. There are 200 plus signatures on a petition at Change.org and an additional 85 plus from going door to door. The neighborhood feels the trees are historical and are important to the neighborhood. She thinks there were 5 trees planted originally and James Dean (one of the Arborists who submitted a report) worked on the original design.

Carolyn Cass-Barton, Member of the Oak Park Advisory Committee feels there is time to delay this decision since the Play Area is currently fenced due to COVID. In 2005, the playground was expanded bringing it closer to the tree. She feels the rubberized padding added at that time is part of the problem. The tree is like the Statue of Liberty for their community, she feels every person in the community is more concerned about saving the tree. There would only be 1 piece

of equipment that needs to be moved if they only remove 1 of the trees. While she does not fully understand the Budget, she feels the parking lot is a good place to divert funds for the tree.

Abele asked if the fencing around the Play Area is there due to the tree safety issue or COVID. Paranick responded the fencing is there due to the safety hazard. While he appreciates the comments from Carolyn, Abele finds it hard to believe for almost an entire year the equipment has not been available to the most important people, our youth.

Sherri Wentworth, Member of the Oak Park Advisory Committee and one of the dissenting votes, is also concerned with the way the tree is leaning, it could fall on the Mae Boyar Building. There has already been a claim against the District as this has been an ongoing safety issue. She loves the trees but feels all things have a life span and there are budget considerations. She suggested planting 2 new trees to replace the ones removed.

Jon Watts, Member of the Oak Park Advisory Committee and the other dissenting vote, agreed safety and the budget are important concerns. His choice would be Option #2. The tree has been there for a long time, but it is not historical. He does try to vote with the Committee when possible but there are many unknowns until excavating begins.

Harry Medved, Member of the Oak Park Advisory Committee would like to see the tree saved. He feels the parking lot is not currently unsafe and those funds should go towards saving the tree.

Chair Abele inquired several times if there were any additional comments from the public, no one else spoke up at this time.

Dennert does not agree with the Oak Park Advisory Committee's decision, but will go with the Committee's recommendation. He wanted it to be clear to the Advisory Committee a planned project in Oak Park would be deferred to cover the cost. In his opinion the funds would be better spent on purchasing healthy trees to replace the damaged ones.

O'Brien asked if deferring the parking lot project would cover all costs. Paranick stated it would, but the lot will have to be done in the future. He also pointed out it is not certain only one piece of play equipment needs to be moved; it will not be clear until the project begins.

Freeman stated she was at Mae Boyar Park the day the park was dedicated. This is a very difficult decision for her.

Abele stated the Oak Park Committee is important but advisory, the District Board is not obligated to go along with their decisions. It is our job to make the right decisions. While the tree is nice, there are many trees that were planted at the park dedication, and the entire park is named after Mae Boyar. Abele asked if the tree is removed can part of the tree be preserved as a bench and what would the cost be. Paranick stated it could, the cost would be approximately \$3,000 to \$4,000.

Motion: Director Johnson moved to approve Option #1, remove both trees, repair the playground surface, and plant two large replacement trees. Chair Abele seconded the motion. The motion carried with the following Roll Call Vote:

Ayes: Abele, Johnson, O'Brien

Noes: Freeman, Dennert

Absent:

Abstain:

Director Freeman added in the grand scheme of things \$37K is not that large of an amount compared to the Community's feelings.

- b. Status of Woolsey Fire Recovery Projects for Simi Valley and Oak Park – The written Staff Report was submitted by Wayne Nakaoka, Director of Planning and Maintenance. District Manager Paranick provided a verbal update regarding the status of numerous fire recovery projects. Some of the larger projects, including the Caretaker Residence, Lagoon rehabilitation, and post and cable fence repairs are about ready to go out for bids.

Chair Abele opened the topic to any Public or Board comments. No one spoke up at this time.

There was no action was taken by the Board tonight.

- c. Consideration of Support for the Rim of the Valley Corridor Preservation Act – The Staff Report was presented by Dan Paranick, District Manager. This Act seeks to expand the boundaries of the Santa Monica National Recreation Area (SMNRA) to include the mountains encircling the San Fernando La Crescenta, Santa Clarita, Simi and Conejo Valleys. Congressman Schiff introduced the original Rim of the Valley bill which was enfolded into the larger Preservation Act. The map attached to the staff report shows the expansion of the boundary area to include much of the Open Space under control of the District. The entire area will become a National Recreation Area, the Federal Government would be able purchase land or partner with other land owners.

Freeman stated this is a large area, does the District have clear plans with the Federal Government direction. Paranick responded over the long term there could be more Federal influence.

Johnson asked how this effects the Santa Monica Conservancy. Paranick responded this could allow the Federal Government to come in and purchase land, work in tandem to purchase and preserve Open Space. Dennert added Imminent Domain is not allowed under this Act, the seller would have to be willing to sell.

Chair Abele opened the topic to public comments.

Jay Kapitz, resident of Oak Park stated in 2016 there was a meeting at Oak Park High School with Congressman Schiff. There was overwhelming support amongst the communities for the Act.

Josh Gray stated he supports this Act fully. He feels the local community is interested in preserving the land.

A community member, name unidentified, feels this Act is really important and has more upsides to it. It is a win-win-win for all parties involved. Having more Open Space is important and should be preserved.

Nicole Lelie, Member of the Oak Park Advisory Committee is in support of this Act, she feels this will provide recreational opportunities and will assist in preserving Open Space. She asked if the Santa Susanna Field Lab (SSFL) location is included. Dennert responded that location has been removed from the boundary, the current map has the SSFL removed from the area.

Jill Abele from Simi Valley is concerned the local communities will not see the preservation or recreational opportunities. She feels the Park District is doing a good job, sometimes too many cooks in the kitchen is not a good thing.

Chair Abele inquired if there were any additional comments from the public, no one else spoke up at this time.

Paranick received emails previous to the Meeting. There were 20 emails; 17 in support and 3 against the Act. Paranick read the emails aloud for the Board and the public (copies are included as an attachment.)

Freeman is unsure about how the Federal Government will work with Local Agencies. Dennert responded he feels they will work well together. Eventually you could hike from Simi Valley all the way to the Beach on clearly marked, well maintained trails. This Act would connect all the trails from the different Agencies. The Santa Monica Conservancy supports this Act.

O'Brien is leaning towards a no vote. Federal overreach makes her nervous, she feels more comfortable with local control. She does like that it excludes Imminent Domain. She asked about wildfire management. Paranick responded land owners will be responsible for their property.

Johnson's main concern about the Act was the inclusion of the SSFL which has now been removed. He added Imminent Domain has never been part of this Act.

Dennert added National Parks are the best idea we've ever had and there is a broad support base for this Act. This would help to bring Eco Tourism to Simi Valley, people will come and actually stay here bringing funds to the community. Look to Conejo Park and Recreation as an example, they have had no complaints about Federal overreach. They have access to many services that are not available here locally, such as educational opportunities and programs. Currently trails between Simi Valley and Oak Park are not clearly marked, this Act would connect the entire trail system in the mapped area.

Abele stated we all want to protect our Open Space, but is this the right way to achieve it. Not all constituents are on board with this plan. He feels this is just a Federal land grab, the rights of property owners will be affected by this, now or down the road. He does not want to allow the Federal Government further control. In fact, he thinks the Board should send a letter opposing this. We are handling Open Space just fine, no problem here, he feels doing nothing would be best. Federal overreach with the handling of the COVID situation is already bad enough. Abele would never attach his signature to a letter requesting more Government, he feels we need less. The inflated Federal Budget is also a huge concern, this is just a bad idea all around and he is opposed. He applauds the Local Agencies handling of Parks.

Dennert added there were only 3 dissenting emails which were addressed during the discussion. This Act even has bipartisan support, bringing Adam Schiff and Steve Knight together on the

topic. We would not lose control; it has not happened in other areas such as Conejo Valley. Dennert is excited that this would bring a National Park to our backyards.

Freeman stated she wants the land to be known as Rancho Simi Recreation and Park District Open Space and Parks.

Motion: Director Dennert moved to approve sending a letter of support for the Rim of the Valley Corridor Preservation Act. Director Johnson seconded the motion. The motion carried with the following Roll Call Vote:

Ayes: Freeman, Johnson, Dennert

Nos: O'Brien, Abele

Absent:

Abstain:

Abele requested the letter clearly indicates the vote was not unanimous. Abele will not sign as he voted no, Vice Chair Dennert will sign. The Board agreed to allow Chair Abele to review the letter before it is sent.

Freeman added she doesn't feel this Act is as clear-cut as presented, she still has some concerns about rights concerning personal property.

- d. Approval of Rancho Simi Recreation and Park District 2020 Conflict of Interest Code Requiring No Amendment – The Staff Report was presented by Theresa Pennington, Director of Administration. Staff is requesting the Board approve attached forms for the 2020 Biennial Review and authorize the District Manager to sign and submit the forms to Ventura County. Motion: Director Freeman moved to authorize the District Manager to sign and submit the required forms. Director O'Brien seconded the motion. The motion carried with a unanimous vote.

#### 10. WRITTEN COMMUNICATIONS OF NOTE – NONE

#### 11. REPORTS BY BOARD MEMBERS

Vice Chair Dennert met with members of the Rotary Club, they are interested in sponsoring a tree planting event. He met with a Boy Scout who has built owl boxes to be placed at Corriganville Park. He likes to see the volunteers who want to be involved in the Community. The option to hold outdoor religious services has been offered if any congregations want to gather in a District Park. Dennert added he wants to see things continue to open, but only when it is safe to do so according to science and medical professionals.

Director Johnson reported he sees the parks he visits being used extensively all day, from young to old. He added Staff are doing a great job keeping the parks looking good.

Director O'Brien attended the Historical Society Committee meeting with Director Freeman. They are looking at ways to safely hold the Día de Los Muertos event and possibly school tours. She attended the Ventura County Special Districts meeting also with Freeman, they provided an informative talk regarding dementia and the burden on caregivers. CSDA held a Zoom meeting, the 2020 CSDA Conference has officially been cancelled due to COVID.

Director Freeman attended the Special Districts meeting along with O'Brien. George Lange from Conejo Recreation was nominated as Director of the Year, this is the second year in a row Ventura County has been represented. Freeman gave a shout out to District Staff for coming up with the PALS program, this will be a great help to the Community. She is proud of Staff for their creative ideas. She requested a card be sent to congratulate George Lange on his award. Paranick responded Staff will take care of it.

Chair Abele gave kudos to Staff for handling the daily workload while the District Manager was on vacation. There were a couple of issues, one regarding a non-permitted Movie in the Park that was planned without approval from the District. Extra stress was placed on Theresa Pennington, Tracy Engel, and Laura Ballantoni. Staff more than capably handled this issue and all three were so poised and great, they really went above and beyond to resolve this. He is happy the Board voted to allow bike and scooter riding at the parks. Thank goodness, at least the youth can be outside and exercise. Abele reported the walking paths in the parks are not in good condition. Some areas are like mud pits, he feels this needs to be addressed quickly, especially with so many people out using the paths. He is excited for the Berylwood Skate Park Ribbon Cutting next week. He feels children being cooped up due to the Pandemic could be a problem down the road.

12. REPORT BY DISTRICT MANAGER – Comments were provided by Dan Paranick who reported permits were issued for a Drive-in Movie event on August 13, 14, and 15 at Rancho Santa Susanna Park.

Upcoming Events: August 11<sup>th</sup> at 5pm will be the Ribbon Cutting event for the Berylwood Skate Plaza.

Future Agenda Items: at this time there are no finalized agenda items for the August 20<sup>th</sup> Board of Directors Meeting.

Committee Activity: there will be an Advanced Planning Committee meeting scheduled to discuss Phase 3 of the Activity Center project.

Vice Chair Dennert inquired about using Zoom or Google Meet for the August 20<sup>th</sup> meeting. He added he feels the District should follow the School District and City of Simi in regards to holding public meetings.

Both Chair Abele and District Manager Paranick are looking to open the meetings to the public as soon as possible. October will also be the start of televised meetings. Paranick will look into Dennert's suggestion for the August 20<sup>th</sup> meeting.

13. CLOSED SESSION – NONE

14. ADJOURNMENT – Chair Abele adjourned the meeting at 9:01pm.



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Dan Paranick  
Dan Paranick, District Clerk