

Town of University Park

Council Committee on Public Facilities and Services

Meeting Notes discussing the condition and future uses of the tennis courts across Wells Run from the Elementary School.

September 15, 2016
7:00 PM
Conference Room
University Park Town Hall
6724 Baltimore Avenue

Present

Committee Members: Joe Thompson, Council Member, Ward 1; Bradlee Hess, Council Member, Ward 3; James Gekas, Council Member, Ward 2 and Committee Chair.

Also Present: Lenford Carey, Mayor of University Park; Public Works Director Mickey Beall; John Brunner, Resident and former Mayor of University Park; Sarah Moseley, Member of the Green Team; and Kara Frome and Tiegh Thompson, Residents of University Park.

The meeting was called to order at 7:05 PM.

Background

Basketball courts were located at one time at the current site of the Wells Run tennis courts. They were removed because of the increasing interest in tennis by Town residents. Unfortunately, surface cracks continued to be a problem because the courts were built with insufficient base on soils too soft to support it in addition to inadequate drainage mitigation.

Noting the cost of repair, the Mayor asked a group of residents to advise him regarding a concept for a new Town playground. Several possible sites were identified, the preference being replacing the courts near Wells Run. The Town's Treasurer Dan Baden put together a Community Parks and Playground Grant application for funds through the Maryland Department of Natural Resources, asking for \$262,000 to construct the playground. The Town would contribute \$75,000 to the project.

Approval of the Grant would require a basic concept plan which the working group of residents and Town officials produced. The Committee Chair asked Kara Frome for the entire participant names who worked on the concept plan replacing the tennis courts with a playground:

Kara Frome
Rebekah Benson-Flannery
Emilie Dworkin
Jamie Lettis
Abbie McCoy
Christie Neff
Keegan Sawyer
Corey Tucker

At the July 25, 2016 regular Council Meeting, the Council referred this concept plan to this Committee so that it can make a recommendation to the Council.

Discussion

The Committee Chair expressed the concern of several residents (who were not present) about having another playground area since there is already a Tot Lot in good shape and a playground at the School. Other residents questioned the maintenance and suggested changing that space to its natural state, a bird sanctuary, or a park within a park (a “pocket park”).

Discussion focused mainly on a playground for older children. At certain times, they may have limited access to the School playground because of the attached sign posted in the cul de sac on Wells Parkway behind the School 2 or 3 years ago. The School may not be enforcing playground restrictions, however. After speaking to a few residents about this restriction, the Committee Chair commented that apparently the facilities are opened to everyone all the time since no one so far has been turned away.

John Brunner added that most of the play equipment, including the shelter, at the school/playground was originally constructed with the help of the PTA, community fundraising, and a grant from a non-profit. With a couple of permanent additions to the school in the back, equipment has been added and rearranged over the years.

Sarah Moseley spoke about having the potential playground site as natural as possible. Reinforcing naturalism into the plan would further help certify the Town in continuing Green status. Consensus was unanimous that the playground should have an “Adirondack” look and feel as opposed to an “Ikea” one.

Public Works Director Mickey Beall noted that the playground mulch (engineered wood fiber (EWF)) would be eco-friendly and meet government standards, and added that weeds mixed with mulch are a big maintenance issue.

Mr. Beall stated that the County may have a program available to remove the existing asphalt in order to meet its permeable surface requirements. The County, however, may have caveats on the use of this land. When asked what the cost would be if the Town bulldozed the tennis courts, he guessed around \$10,000. The leaf pad would remain, however, since the pad was built to support heavy equipment. Mr. Beall provided a picture of the conceptual playground superimposed on the tennis courts which is attached to these notes.

Mr. Brunner commented that before any decision beyond the conceptual phase is reached, demographic data, some available from the most recent census, would be useful in identifying the ages of potential users, current and forth-coming in the placement area.

Although only one playground vender was asked to provide drawing and cost figures, the Committee agreed that the Town would attempt to “piggyback” on larger government playground projects in order to reduce the cost. This was recently done with the upgraded tennis courts across from the Word of God Church.

The Mayor commented that he would reach out to residents around the tennis courts and solicit their concerns. He suggested a neighborhood block gathering in the vicinity.

The Committee had available drawings provided by Cunningham Recreation. CM Joe Thompson emphasized that this was a conceptual drawing only for the purpose of seeking the Grant. That is, no details of the play equipment in the drawing are or should be considered at this time.

CM Brad Hess expressed his support for a playground in place of the tennis courts.

A decision on the Grant is expected July 2017. The Committee offered no recommendations at this time but will keep this issue open for future discussion.

The meeting adjourned at 8:00 PM.

