

PARKS, RECREATION & CULTURAL RESOURCES ADVISORY BOARD
CITY OF PALMER, ALASKA
SPECIAL MEETING
THURSDAY, JULY 9, 2015
7:00 P.M. - COUNCIL CHAMBERS

A. CALL TO ORDER:

The special first meeting of the City of Palmer Parks, Recreation & Cultural Resources Advisory Board was called to order by Board Member Helene Antel at 7:00 p.m.

B. ROLL CALL:

Present and constituting a quorum were Board Members:

Helene Antel
Stephanie Allen
Jo Ehmann
Dot Helm
Jan Newman

Also present were:

Sandra Garley, Community Development Director
Kimberly McClure, Planning & Code Compliance Technician

C. PLEDGE OF ALLEGIANCE: led by Ms. Garley.

D. APPROVAL OF AGENDA: The agenda was approved as presented.

E. AUDIENCE PARTICIPATION:

Verda Lewis, Palmer resident, spoke to the Board to offer input and inquire what the intentions are for parks. She noted that for many years the south end of Palmer has never had any place for children to play. The population of the area is growing and there are two 12-plexes and five new small houses on S. Chugach and KnikKnik plus a four-plex. She spoke to the possibility of 150 kids in this neighborhood and thinks the idea of a park is absolutely necessary. She encouraged that the Board listen to the people, rather than just take professional input, and suggested using the City of Seward's example of some of the parks they built which are divided into toddler and older children parks. Instead of boats, the City of Palmer could focus on tractors and trains that depict the Valley; suggested a giant cabbage to play in; and other things to run, jump, play, and climb on. Also on S. Chugach she would like to see some of the land used for parking along with laying out a park.

F. NEW BUSINESS:

1. Introduction of Members.

At Ms. Garley suggestion, board members introduced themselves and shared their backgrounds and reasons for wanting to serve on the board.

Dot Helm has lived on the north end of Palmer for about 35 years; worked at the Experiment Station for 25 years before retiring and since that time has been very active in helping with trails as well as using them. She was involved with the City during development of the Comprehensive Plan and was excited to hear that something is actually happening with the trails master plan. She also is interested in the Arboretum, school crossings and road crossings and connections to trails.

Helene Antel is a mostly-retired attorney and avid user of the trails. She is not sure where all the park facilities are in the city, but will be sure to familiarize herself with parks and playgrounds being discussed. She is delighted to have time to make a contribution to her community and is specifically interested in working to cultivate partnerships with other community agencies. She read the Master Plan and was very impressed by it, but funding is needed to do the things that Ms. Lewis talked about as well as even the simple things identified in the plan, such as signage, to make the existing facilities easier for residents and guests of our community to locate. All of that requires money and she believes she has some skills to offer building bridges between the City, this Board, and community organizations.

Jo Ehmman has lived in Alaska 54 years. She recently moved into Palmer nine months ago and is retired from Colony High School after 21 years as a bilingual teacher. She has 11 grown grandchildren and 22 great grandchildren. She has seen Palmer grow in a way that she thinks most have not. Palmer was so small, but now we need to have something for the people who are moving in and believes it is very important that as a Board to make it happen. She is excited and honored to be asked to be on this Board and believes we will make good things happen.

Stephanie Allen lives in Cedar Hills and is also excited about the opportunity to work with everyone on the Board. She thinks the city has been doing an amazing job of keeping up with all the different facilities without any dedicated staff and is already working with the different volunteer groups and agencies that exist to enhance and maintain existing structures and parks and playgrounds. This is an opportunity to expand and develop and further cultivate relationships and partnerships in the community. She thinks the Master Plan was very informative and although it is a few years old is still very relevant. She is excited about moving forward on different projects and gathering support from the community.

Jan Newman, resident of the Palmer area for 26 years, lives on Lazy Mountain. She has raised her family here and has seen a fair number of changes in the last couple of decades. She is also a spearhead of the Grow Palmer Project which is a public food project in town. Her excitement and motivation for being part of this Board stems from building a healthy strong community, which includes parks and trails that she has used extensively herself over the years, and to also bring together the community agencies and residents in and outside of the city to work towards building something that can thrive and continue. She thinks signage and wayfinding is hugely important and believes we have the potential to make Palmer a destination in Alaska. A large part of that is having a strong parks, trails, and recreational system for people to navigate

themselves as well as visitors.

2. Election of Chair.

Helene Antel was duly nominated and unanimously elected Chair of the newly-formed Board and agreed to serve for the initial period until November, 2015.

Stephanie Allen was duly nominated and unanimously elected Vice Chair of the Board and agreed to serve for the initial period until November, 2015.

3. Review of Board Duties.

Ms. Garley directed attention to the packet for copy of PMC Chapter 2.22, which governs the Parks, Recreation, and Cultural Resources Advisory Board; suggested keeping it for reference at future meetings. She explained the purpose of the board is to develop, support, and advise the City Council, that on matters pertaining to city parks and recreational facilities and cultural programs, the board will not be the final decision maker but will be advising, prioritizing projects, and making recommendations based on how the board thinks dollars and resources should be spent. Another important purpose is to make recommendations to the Council on placement of memorials and plaques. Ms. Garley went over Board duties and responsibilities (2.22.020), explained the minimal budget, responsibilities related to the Golf Course, and answered questions related to the duties. Also in the packet for reference is Ordinance 15-019 governing the operation of all city boards and commissions and a handout from the City Clerk on the Parliamentary Process, Roberts Rules, Committee of the Whole, Voting, and information on the Open Meetings Act. Ms. Garley emphasized the importance of board members adhering to the directions of the Open Meetings Act.

4. Presentation and Discussion of Palmer Parks, Trails, and Recreational Facilities Master Plan.

Ms. Garley highlighted and summarized the status of the city parks and facilities described in the Master Plan. She explained the background and history of the Babb Arboretum, noting that many people are not aware that it even exists, that it is a priority of the city council to bring it back. Questions of staff and informal discussion took place putting forth various ideas as Ms. Garley led board members through the Master Plan for city parks.

City Manager Joe Hannan briefly addressed the board with other matters for the board to consider and to question staff about, such as the museum, the visitor's center, the museum's plan for the future, the library and the art collection, available funding. He thanked board members for their commitment of time stating that a board such as this is way overdue and believes the possibilities for the city are unlimited. He encouraged joint meetings with the City Council and to ask for some of the things that are needed.

Ms. Garley informed regarding the art collection contained in the Library and initiated discussion on making it more readily available to share the art with the public. She

further informed regarding the Visitor's Center (owned by the City and operated by the Palmer Museum of History and Art), the art collection contained in the Visitor's Center, and the Gardens adjacent to the Visitor's Center. Ms. Garley also spoke to the Quad, Depot/Community Center, Friday Fling area, Shane Woods Memorial Trail (Depot north to Skateboard Park), trail design (Depot to Fairgrounds).

Ms. Garley concluded by distributing a handout and discussed the Alaska Historic Preservation Conference, to be held in Anchorage on October 20-22, 2015; believes it will be very informative and if board members are interested in attending to let her know via email and she will reserve a seat.

G. BOARD MEMBER COMMENTS:

Board Member Newman commented that she is trying to sort out how best to proceed. There are many things that need to be addressed, so do you start with funding and then look at particular areas that you want to develop, enhance, or improve, or do you look at those areas that you want to develop, enhance, or improve and then try to find the funding?

Board Member Allen expressed appreciation to Ms. Garley for the wonderful summary and overview. She was wondering how Palmer city trails fit into or in relation to the master plan for trails of the Mat-Su Health Foundation. Board Member Helm informed that the Mat-Su Health Foundation is now doing funding through the Mat-Su Trails and Parks Foundation, and they are still evolving and sorting things out, noting there has been some interaction with the City and she hopes there is more interaction. Further discussion ensued regarding connecting existing trails.

Board Member Ehmman commented that funding seems to always be the problem, but also people in general are unaware or informed of what is out there, and thinks it should be a function of the Board to inform the public. She herself was not aware of some of these parks and trails and plans to go to each one. She also thinks it is important to have a connection with the Borough.

Ms. Garley suggested one the first things to tackle would be to have a sign at every park.

Chair Antel commented that she is overwhelmed with how little she knows, but is excited by how much there is to be done, and encouraged everyone to spend some time thinking about priorities. It is important as a group for us to establish a short list of priorities in that you have to want something in particular before asking for money. She suggested coming up with one or two projects to start and perhaps in the process of trying to obtain funding for that project, we can learn more generally about how to apply for funding, how to make connections with other community organizations, and how to work on things like connectivity between trails. She thinks good signage identifying existing parks and trails is probably more manageable. She also will be visiting the parks but is not sure where they all are; asked if there was a brochure or pamphlet available that says "welcome to the City of Palmer trail system?" Ms. Garley

directed attention to the City's website where you will find a list of city parks and by clicking on each one will give you its location and information about it.

Ms. Antel continued that it is important to have a brochure or pamphlet in the Visitor's Center that would guide tourists out on our trails talking about how beautiful Palmer is. She is overwhelmed but not deterred, that we should be practical – limited objectives, maximum effort toward achievement; suggested being goal-oriented and actually accomplish something instead of just talking.

Board Member Helm commented with regard to volunteer jobs, like mowing grass at Wilson Park, there are so many resources in this state and we can't expect government to do everything. Volunteers are absolutely crucial to almost every level of government, whether it's the City, the Borough, the State. If people living near Wilson Park, for example, and are using it, maybe it just needs to be suggested to volunteer. Further discussion ensued regarding soliciting volunteers to help with maintenance of neighborhood parks. Ms. Helm also talked about and advocated the importance of signs, that they make a huge difference, discussing the Crevasse Moraine Trail System as an example.

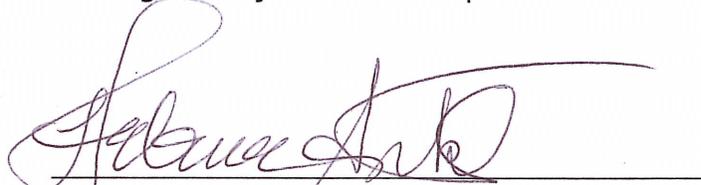
Ms. Garley will try to have Public Works Director, Tom Healy, and Crew Leader, Scott Johnson to talk about what they would like to see from the Board as they build their budgets for next year.

Ms. Garley reminded at next meeting to consider changing the September 3 meeting because of the holiday weekend.

H. ADJOURNMENT:

There being no further business, the meeting was adjourned at 8:31 p.m.

Next meeting: August 6, 2015.



Helene Antel, Chairman



Sandra Garley, Community Development Director