

Westgrove Pack Meeting Minutes April 3rd, 2019

Meeting began at 6:35pm
Meeting ends at 8:08pm

In attendance: Anne Street, Jeff Pandin, Melissa Pandin, Mark Thomsen, Marissa Vesay, Chrissy Daily, Megan Kesling and Emma McAlary

Fairfax County Park Authority (FCPA) surveys Westgrove Park

The chair joined FCPA at Westgrove a week or so ago to assess the drainage issues and compliance with accessibility laws. Regarding drainage, a couple of items were discussed:

1. Flipping the park - This approach takes advantage of the slope and natural drainage already available on the bigger side. The county could manipulate the size of each half, or 3rd, to our liking. The chair expressed concern about water draining down the slope into the already muddy area, making matters worse. Furthermore, it wasn't clear what would be done on the smaller side. Under this approach, the top end would be stone dusted and remain open year round
2. Regrade and stone dust the lower side - Preferred option. Aligns with what the BOD has already discussed. The smaller side would be re-graded to the greatest extent possible, then stone dusted. FCPA would take advantage of the inlet already there, assuming it's viable to use. The smaller side would remain open year round like we currently do, but with less mud. We hope. The county believes the stone dust will soak up of the water.

The county is planning a 2nd visit to analyze the topography of the smaller side in preparation for grading. Todd alluded that any work would likely be done this fall (2019). ADA compliance improvements were also discussed.

Update on Fertilizer

Mark also tells us that there are dog friendly fertilizers available as per the county, but they will have to be used in the fall. He will have to discuss this with the county further and get back to us. Jeff emphasizes that we must communicate that the fertilizers are DOG FRIENDLY. We might get push back from the RPA group.

We discuss that someone will complain no matter what and Jeff tells us that the golf course is in the RPA area and they use fertilizer. He suspects that no one complains because the golfers generate so much cash and if they are upset they will make a stink. We might need to raise our voices too.

Accessibility improvements coming to Westgrove

From what the board can gather, the country is taking urgent action to improve accessibility at the park. In fact, a new "Handicap Parking" sign has been installed in

front of the middle vestibule. The board fully supports any accessibility improvements FCPA makes to Westgrove. Details are still being worked out, but all entrances will undergo a turf change to better support accessibility to the Off Leash Dog Area (ODLA). This will likely include paving entrances and creating ADA-compliant walkways within the park.

The FCPA asked the board to consider the preferred surface of a path between the patio and nearest entrance. Stone dust or asphalt were presented as options by FCPA. The board is considering these, but also researching the use of stamped concrete or pavers for this pathway. Placing the pathway closest to the fence was considered. This location isn't frequented by dogs except on Hot Dog Friday Nights when they're watching their humans eat those juicy hot dogs.

Considerations of path surfaces were made: if pavers were broken, the board would have to fix them. If stone dust is used, the PACK would have to maintain. Stamped concrete was preferred because it aligns with the patio's aesthetics and minimal maintenance.

The chair did express concern with FCPA approvals re: stamped concrete and whether it was in the best interest of the community targeted by ACA laws. Either way, the chair promised to engage the county about the use and cost of stamped concrete. The final decision will be made via board vote sometime in the future.

Spring Cleaning

A board member proposed the idea of tying our spring clean-up to Earth Day. This received overwhelming support from other members. Spring Clean-up will be on April 27th from 10AM until we're tired. Announcements will be made via Facebook, Twitter, MailChimp. We'll also place a flyer on the kiosk and sandwich board.

A proposed todo list was created:

1. Clean-up poop
2. Clean outside of shed
3. Clean up weeds around benches
4. Clean up chairs
5. Clean up invasive species
6. Fix the gate hinges
7. Clean all the signs
8. Clean chairs and trash cans
9. Fill in holes
10. Plant flowers (Need flower pots)
11. Clean and reinstall brochure dispensers

Another board member received word from a prior board member that the brochure dispensers had disappeared. The Chair clarified they were put away during winter clean-up. The board will reinstall by spring clean-up.

The next General Meeting (May 8th - 6:30 PM - 8 PM)

The chair desired to hold our general meeting at the park itself, but after consulting with other board members, the library was chosen. The logistics to manage people's dogs and attention would be too overwhelming. Also, if voting is planned, it would be hard to identify who has voting rights (caretakers).

The agenda will include 1) county matters, and 2) project updates

Safety

Certain board members have been confronted by a particular hostile park patron on more than one occasion. The county has been notified and is aware of this park user. Westgrove is public property and everyone has a right to be there, but if threats are made or implied, the board feels these incidents need to be documented and reported to the county.

County Matters

Memorandum of Agreement (MOU) -

No major updates on the MOU. Two board members restated their desire for the PACK to delay the signing of the MOU until the drainage is fixed.

FCPA approval for projects -

Questions about project arise. Mark restates what FCPA has told him, and that is, we can submit projects for approval and the county will use the existing procedures (pre-MOU) to review and approve them. The board discusses the purpose of the MOU and why it's necessary.

Record keeping -

More discussion of grass management ensues. We are in a different phase of the grass experiment. How early can we open it? We are going to have to remind them that they made us open the grass a month early if it doesn't work. We need to have everything documented and a clear record.

Anne says keep all the email exchanges. Take notes at subsequent meetings with the county, sign it and send it to them.

Melissa says that the board needs to see all the emails. Mark says no. Melissa asks Mark to CC her instead of the entire board. Melissa is concerned that the rest of the park will be in the dark if we have to communicate without them. Mark agrees to CC Melissa on emails.

Chrissy says print them and keep them in a file so we can have proof. Marissa says if you are really concerned about legal recourse. Email is a legal document. We will have proof.

Drainage—

Several board members express frustration towards the county because of their lack of action over the past years. This frustration is leading to concern that no action will be taken to solve the drainage problem anytime soon.

The board asks the chair to set expectations with the county on a timeline, and Mark agrees to have that conversation. We need a better idea of FCPA's timeline for solving this problem because of sodding/seeding reasons too. The board agrees to start escalating if FCPA does not provide a plan by July 4th, 2019.

Procedure for opening and closing the gates -

The gates were opened earlier this year because FCPA directed us to open them. Because of this premature opening, the grass isn't expected to last as long. To mitigate the impact of this premature opening, the board desires to actively manage the turf by enforcing the closure criteria listed in the county email that Mark shared.

Furthermore, the board discussed 1) need for a procedure to manage the gates/turf during this time, and what that procedure might look like - We don't need a 9 person consensus. The person closing the gates will take a photo and share with the board and county. Communication to park users is a must.

We don't reach a firm conclusion on how to execute this, and realize it will be a difficult undertaking.

Mark agrees to take a first stab at writing this procedure. Emma and Megan agree to help communicate it; posting to kiosk or emailing. A members suggested putting the county's POC for Westgrove on the procedure/flyer.

Treasurer's Report

Balance:
\$24,882.42

The board has chosen to not pursue grants this year. We have incoming funds to take on several projects at this time.

Legal Assessment

The chair suggested engaging an attorney to assess the PACK's legal risks/exposures in light of the responsibilities in the MOU. One member suggested this is premature. Another suggested engaging a park patron who's an attorney. We could discuss how to handle both pack members and non-pack members. We can probably have two standards of care for people who have paid us money. and another standard for the general public. We have a legal responsibility to the county and our members.

One member expressed the position that the general public has no right to say how the park is operated because they are not part of the organization the county recognizes for operating the park. The question was raised - Can we refuse membership to anybody? This would be a great question for the attorney.

The chair said the board needs to clearly understand it's responsibilities and legal risks with operating the park. Another member stated the MOU covers this.

Getting in touch with our caretakers

The board discussed surveying park users and caretakers so we can better represent their concerns and opinions with the county. Two surveys would be sent with different questions - members and non-members.

One board member emphasized we work for members. The chair agreed, but emphasized the non-paying members can contact the county and influence the direction of the park.

Survey -

The idea of a survey was discussed. We need to be thoughtful in our design and ask the right questions. Questions should be multiple choice and not leading. We'd reach people using MailChimp, which has 700+ names on it. We need to make a best-effort to reach people not in our MailChimp address book too. We did not conclude on how to proceed with the survey.

Email to paying pack members about the county decision to open the gate is discussed. We want them to know it was a county decision. We want the park users to know we are not wasting the money they have so generously donated. If we don't get serious action in the next 6 months we will not have a membership.

Email announcement to Caretakers (People that give money to the PACK) -

Jeff has drafted an email to be sent to our caretakers. The purpose of this email is to inform them of the gate closure and to encourage them to contact the FCPA about the premature opening. We need to let our caretakers know that we didn't open the gates prematurely and therefore potentially waste the money they gave us for managing the turf.

Projects

The board throws around projects not dependent on county work - the setting around trees; maybe adding benches, or installing a doggy playground. No conclusions were reached on this matter

Next board meetings:
May 2nd @ The Pandin's
June 12th @ Anne's