

City of Montgomery
Parks and Recreation Committee Minutes
June 19, 2023

Staff Present

Brian Riblet, City Manager
Tracy Henao, Asst. City Manager
John Crowell, Police Chief
Gary Heitkamp, Public Works Director
Julie Machon, Recreation Director
Lisa Lorenz, Recreation Specialist
Terry Donnellon, Law Director
Connie Gaylor, Clerk of Council

Committee Members Present

Sasha Naiman, Chair
Chris Dobrozsi
Mike Cappel

The Parks and Recreation Committee of Council convened its meeting for June 19, 2023 at 4:00 p.m. with Mrs. Naiman presiding.

New Business

Pickleball Discussion

Mr. Riblet provided background on the installation of pickleball courts and the meetings that have occurred since the popularity of the sport has grown. He stated that installing the courts at Dulle Park has created unintended consequences regarding noise. He explained that since the 2020 installation of the courts the noise complaints have prompted discussions on how to best address the concerns of neighbors near the Dulle Park courts specifically. These discussions have been at Parks and Recreation Commission and Parks and Recreation Committee public meetings. Staff has researched the cost of installing acoustifence to contain the sound and found it to be fairly expensive with no guarantee that it will reduce the noise levels to the surrounding neighbors. Mr. Riblet explained to the Committee that there are other entities that are regulating noise by not only limiting hours but also days to balance play with the noise. He added that a discussion of alternate sites has also been conducted with Weller Park being the only viable option. Mr. Riblet explained that preliminary work is being done to research Weller Park as a long term solution. Mr. Riblet stated if Weller Park were the direction Council would go, does it make sense to spend money on fencing and a sound study at Dulle Park. He added that these decisions may not be solely the decision of the Committee but that of full City Council as a full budgetary request. He added that while we are discussing this today, these discussions may not render a decision from this meeting.

Mrs. Naiman thanked Mr. Riblet for all the information shared and stated to those in attendance that the Committee would listen to their input and go back to City Council for a larger discussion.

Guests and Residents

Tom Montchai-7899 Symphony Lane-Mr. Montchai related to the Committee that living behind the courts is an absolute nightmare. He stated that while he appreciates what has been done as far as the hour restriction as it gives him two hours a night of peace and quiet. He stated that the police do have to enforce the time limits, or the players will continue to play. He stated that

he continues to follow up with Mr. Riblet to encourage the courts to be relocated to Weller Park. He stated he had hoped that something could be done sooner. He asked the Committee and those in attendance to imagine not being able to open their windows or sit outside. He explained that he regularly walks in both parks, and you can also hear the noise in Pioneer Park. He explained that he understands how pickleball has become a real problem throughout the country. He feels that the players are indifferent to the neighboring resident's feelings. He stated that the noise is not just the sound of the sport being played but the players who are yelling at each other as well. He suggested removing the nets and the markings now and moving everything to Weller Park now and leaving tennis at Dulle Park.

Tim O'Neill, 7825 Hartford Hill Lane-Mr. O'Neill explained that he was in attendance to understand the principle behind establishing the hours. He stated that the restriction of hours made it difficult for players who work to have time to play in the evening. He asked if the Committee could compromise and extend the hours to 8:00 p.m. He stated that typically the park closes at dusk and asked if there was an hour specific to that.

Chief Crowell stated that dusk normally means 10:00 p.m. depending on the park and season.

Mr. O'Neill asked why the City would disenfranchise people who want to play. He stated that he felt hearing the noise from a park is the price people pay for living next to a park. Mr. O'Neill recommended extending the court hours at the end of the school year.

Dena Clark, 10425 Deerfield Road- Ms. Clark stated that she attended a Parks and Recreation Commission meeting in May where she presented a petition with 75-80% of residents asking for an extension of the hours of the pickleball courts. She explained that as a working mom it's hard to get to the courts and play before the 7:00 p.m. closing time. She stated that the group of players feel 8:00 p.m. would be more reasonable. She asked if the decibel levels were tested and if so, were they above the Noise Ordinance levels. She stated that she pays taxes to enjoy the parks.

Chief Crowell stated he measured the decibel levels on a day with a good number of people playing. He stated that he measured from different locations within the park and the highest reading was at 68 decibels, which was not above the accepted range of 70. He stated that while it was not a violation on the path where the highest was measured, it was noticeable.

Ms. Clark asked if there are a lot of complaints. She stated she is curious about the volume of residents who are complaining.

Mrs. Naiman thanked everyone for their comments. She explained that there is a balancing act to be had in this situation, a group of residents who want to enjoy their homes and a group of players who want to enjoy the parks. She stated that it appeared the route that is being suggested is to look at a solution in Weller Park in 2024. She stated that leaves staff and Council to determine what to do at this time. She stated that it is to be considered that there will be more people playing at the park than living next to it. She stated it is more about consistency of use and noise.

Ms. Clark explained that the players use a phone app that allows players to note where they are playing and many times they arrive at the park, and it is not open, so they have to call the get the gate open.

Mr. Cappel stated that the best solution is not local government imposing solutions but having people directly involved to come together to work out hours. He contemplated that by moving the courts to another park, the problem may just be moved to another area. He added in the end the best solution is the players and neighbors coming together to find a solution like the soccer groups did. He stated that if that doesn't happen then Council will come up with a solution, they feel is best and that may not be the solution that either group is wanting.

Mr. O'Neill asked what will happen if the groups don't meet to come to an agreement. What principle will be put into play. He stated he felt extending the hours is a compromise.

Mr. Cappel stated that the principle was already set. He stated that personally he is okay to shift the hours if that is what is decided. He suggested that feelings be put aside to find a solution.

Mr. Montchai stated that he doesn't think the players understand. He asked if they consider the residents who live there. He stated they pay taxes as well. He stated he only has two hours a day he can sit down and enjoy being outside.

Mr. Dobrozsi thanked everyone for coming to the meeting. He explained that the principle that is being discussed is a short term solution for what is in front of the Committee at this time. He stated the Committee and staff know there needs to be a permanent solution but there needs to be a compromise at this time. Mr. Dobrozsi stated that he was glad to hear that sound mitigation was researched. He stated that he would like to know what research has been done for Weller Park.

Mr. Heitkamp explained that he and other staff members are currently researching the cost and feasibility of moving the courts to Weller Park but haven't completed the process at this time. He stated that in terms of parks Weller is the only solution. He explained that there were two basketball courts at Weller, and one was already converted to pickleball. He stated that to make the existing court more attractive to players to play at, fencing would need to be added. He stated that Weller Park would be the furthest removed court from homes located in The Reserves and Vintage Club. He stated that the benefit is that there is a good distance to the homes, however parking has always been an issue and will need to be considered if additional courts are added. He stated that maybe shared parking could be discussed with Good Shepherd Church. He stated that looking at the big picture of Weller Park that the orientation of the court needs to be considered as the players have provided feedback that the court needs to be rotated so they are not looking into the sun. Also, if the existing basketball court is eliminated, would an additional one be added. Mr. Heitkamp explained that there is not as much room there as may be thought. Mr. O'Neill asked if there was a possibility of working with the school to utilize some of their courts.

Mr. Riblet explained that the City has a good relationship with the Schools so a conversation could be addressed, however he felt competing with their schedules could be a challenge as well.

Mrs. Naiman stated she is grateful for people utilizing the parks however the challenge is balancing all the opportunities of the parks in a policy that works.

Mr. O'Neill stated he felt a compromise was extending the hours to 8:00 p.m. He asked if there was another solution.

Mr. Montchai stated that the violation level is at 70 and the highest was at 68. He stated he felt by adding in the screaming, they are in violation. He stated these levels are in the Ordinance, within 20' of the property line. He stated the players think giving residents one hour a day with no playing is a compromise. He asked if that sounded right to the Committee.

Mr. Cappel explained that the Committee is here to listen to all sides. He stated that he felt pickleball is not a fad and is here to stay. He restated that the best possible solution is to come to a collaborative solution. He stated that digging into one's personal beliefs is not the best way to find the best path forward. He stated that solutions come when people work together and not ask people to impose rules on them.

Mr. O'Neill asked if the Committee would consider a Monday, Wednesday, Friday extension of hours and restricting on the weekends as people who work have more flexibility.

Mrs. Naiman stated that the Committee would take all the conversation under advisement and that a larger conversation would need to be had so no decision would be made at that time.

Minutes


Mr. Dobrozsi moved to approve the minutes from the March 13, 2023 Parks and Recreation meeting. Mr. Cappel seconded. The Committee unanimously agreed.

Other Business

There was no other business

Adjournment

Mr. Dobrozsi moved for adjournment. Mr. Cappel seconded. The Committee unanimously agreed. The meeting adjourned at 4:50 p.m.



Chair