

CITY OF CAMDEN PARKS & TREES COMMISSION
MEETING MINUTES (DRAFT) – February 3, 2015

Members Present: Jane Miller, Susan White, Sue Truesdale, Al Reed, Thelma Rutledge and Bob Williams

Absent: MJ Rowell

Staff: Liz Gilland, Urban Forester

Special guest: Catherine French, Executive Director of the National Steeplechase Museum

NEXT MEETING: March 3, 2015 @ 4:00PM

The meeting was opened at 4:05 p.m. Liz welcomed Catherine French to the meeting and introduced her to everyone present. The minutes from the January 2015 meeting were reviewed. A motion was made and seconded to approve the minutes, all agreed.

SPECIAL PRESENTATION: Catherine French met with Mayor Tony Scully, City Manager Mel Pearson and Urban Forester Liz Gilland in January to present an idea. Her idea was to donate approximately a dozen decorative bird houses to the City. These bird houses would be custom made, fashioned after historic Camden buildings and large in dimension. The purpose for them would be to auction off as a fundraiser for the Museum and then donated them to the City for placement in some of our more prominent parks. The idea for this project came from the City of Saratoga Springs, NY who has decorative bird houses placed throughout a large and prominent park in their City. After this initial meeting, the City Manager requested that the Commission make a recommendation to him as to whether or not the City should accept the bird houses and place them in the parks. Therefore, Catherine was invited to share this information again, this time with the Commission members. She stated that the bird houses in NY are not functioning nesting boxes but are used for security cameras. The Camden bird houses would be real nesting boxes. She also stated that since the Camden ones would be made out of cedar or cypress wood that they would be maintenance free. In terms of maintaining birds nesting in the houses, she suggested that the city could get volunteers to clean them out once a year. She thanked everyone for the opportunity to present her idea and was then excused from the meeting.

CITY UPDATE:

Budget time – Funding is being requested for Christmas decorations, a summer intern and three Park improvement projects (purchase steel trash cans, Kendall Clubhouse and playground ‘fall-zone’ materials).

Christmas decorations – All decorations are finally down, but still not all put away. The Street Dept will be spray painting many of the red bows which have severely faded in an attempt to make them last one more year.

Commerce Alley Improvement Project – Same as last month.

1001 Broad Street – The Electric Dept has installed lighting and David Joseph has begun landscape work. The project will be delayed however because of the installation of below-ground concrete tubes which will anchor metal poles to be used next Christmas in hanging lights off of the Clock Tower. The City is waiting on special-ordered bolts before proceeding with installation. This must be done before the remainder of the landscape project can resume.

Kendall Park improvements – The trail is complete and we are waiting on two signs to be made which will be installed along the trail.

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Summer intern – Liz will be requesting approval and funding for a summer college student to perform an internship as an assistant arborist. She reduced the hourly rate and hopes that the request will be viewed favorably.

Other – Liz met with Tony Burns recently and they decided to pursue getting irrigation plans for the following parks: Monument Square, Archives Park, City Arena Park, City Hall Park and Edgewood Park. Once the plans have been received we will work on RFBs to get the irrigation installed this summer. Other miscellaneous Parks tasks are being worked on, see attached list.

CURRENT BUSINESS

Park Use Policy Review – The policy was reviewed and various provisions within the document specifically discussed. Liz will incorporate everyone's comments in a revised version and present at the March meeting.

Margot Rochester Landscape Award Program – The group collectively decided to defer the award program to next year.

NEW BUSINESS

Decorative bird houses project – Below is listed the City's concerns and findings regarding the potential placement of up to 12 large bird houses in some of the city parks. Liz shared this information with the group.

The City of Saratoga Springs, NY has a year-round population of 28,000 (four times larger than Camden) and a thriving tourist season. Liz called their Public Works Dept. in January and spoke with a Donna Buckley about the bird houses in Congress Park. She was informed that they employ master carpenters who, originally built and now maintain (paint, fix and clean) the houses on a yearly basis. Liz also researched Cornell University's College of Ornithology and the National Blue bird Society websites as well as spoke with local naturalist Austin Jenkins because she was concerned with the type of birds who might use the bird houses as nesting boxes. Apparently, starlings and English sparrows, both invasive bird species, have aggressive nesting-box behavior and are drawn to nests that are already in place. As such, they tend to displace native birds such as bluebirds, nuthatches and Carolina wrens to name a few. To stop the invasive birds from stealing nesting sites, the bird houses would have to be monitored weekly during the nesting season to eradicate the birds.

After discussion and consideration, the group recommendation is not to accept the decorative bird houses for our parks at this time. Even though everyone thought this a great and unique idea, the yearly maintenance would be problematic and prohibitive for the Public Works Dept. In addition, trying to find and get a commitment from volunteer groups would not be reliable. The Parks & Trees Commission members do encourage the National Steeplechase Museum to proceed with their idea and to consider donating the houses to other facilities around town such as the Library, Chamber of Commerce, Fine Arts Center and Historic Camden, etc. Liz will draft a memo to City Manager Mel Pearson on behalf of the Commission members with their recommendation.

With no further business, the meeting was adjourned at 5:40 p.m.

NEXT MEETING: March 3, 2015 @ 4:00PM

Respectfully submitted by Liz Gilland, Camden Urban Forester