

MINUTES  
MAYOR'S BLUE RIBBON COMMITTEE PRESCOTT PARK POLICY ADVISORY COMMITTEE  
7:30 A.M. – Wednesday, July 12, 2017  
Conference Room A, Portsmouth City Hall

Members in attendance: Tom Watson, Chair; Chris Dwyer, City Councilor; Genevieve Aichele, Resident; Michael Barker, Resident; Robin Lurie-Meyerkopf, Art-Speak Representative

Member Absent: Alan Gordon, Resident

Staff Present: John P. Bohenko, City Manager; David Moore, Assistant City Manager

1. Call to Order

Chair Watson called the meeting to order at 7:30 a.m.

2. Consideration of Meeting Minutes –June 21, 2017

The June 21, 2017 minutes were not available for consideration.

3. Scheduling Parameters Discussion with Prescott Park Arts Festival Leadership

Chair Watson gave a brief update of committee activities to date and explained that a report is projected to be submitted to the City Manager by September with recommendations of what to incorporate into the 2018 Prescott Park user agreements.

Chair Watson then invited representatives of the Prescott Park Arts Festival to the table who introduced themselves as follows: Jameson French, Chairman of the Board of PPAF; Ken Bellevue, Vice Chair of PPAF; Joel Harris, Board member and downtown business owner; and Ben Anderson, President of PPAF.

Mr. French gave a brief history of his involvement with the Prescott Park Arts Festival and Trustees of the Trust Fund. He explained that the festival has undergone various economic hardships in the past and that in the 1980's downtown businesses became heavily involved in turning the festival into an economic driver by bringing people into the downtown during the weeknights. He further explained the costs of running the Prescott Park Arts Festival and the variables in revenues including donations, weather, etc. which a wet summer can quickly diminish their reserves.

City Manager Bohenko requested the 990 for 2016 and financials which have been requested but not yet received. He stated that the PPAF should no longer be listing building depreciation in their documents. Mr. French stated they do not, only equipment.

Mr. French continued explaining that the PPAF looks to providing programming for all different types of audiences and requires flexibility to do so. He stated that movie night has the highest concentration of Portsmouth residents and families and is very affordable, so that is another type of audience that is served.

Next, Mr. Bellevue gave a brief history of his involvement on the PPAF stating that 15 years ago the members had to pass around a hat to raise funds. He continued that it is very different now with a variety of concerts and a new play every season which bring in different audiences. He stated that the costs of running the PPAF are set and cutting back on any of the days impacts the revenues.

Councilor Dwyer stated that the fixed costs aren't totally fixed as if there is no performance on a given night, then they are not paying for the act which can be expensive.

Mr. Bellevue stated that the fixed costs are always there.  
Councilor Dwyer asked if the fixed costs have been calculated.

Discussion ensued.

Mr. French stated that the play is a fixed cost operation with sets, actors, musicians etc. and if we lose 3 nights due to weather or reduce the schedule, then it is a question of whether it is viable to pay for the higher quality. He stated that when the quality has been less in the past, people didn't like it.

City Manager Bohenko discussed the accomplishments that have been achieved this season by working together with city staff and the PPAF staff. He stated that once the financials are received, which he would like as soon as possible, they will be reviewed by our Finance Department staff. He continued that there is a special revenue fund for Prescott Park which tracks all finances for the park and currently there is a \$30,000 revenue gap. He continued that the City Council recently approved funding for the new sound system with lights, red, yellow and green, which is still being tweaked but will allow data to be collected for every performance and reviewed. Next, regarding alcohol in the Park, he feels it is somewhat overblown, but he understands it has occurred. He stated that the Arts Festival staff walks around the crowd and there is a police officer as well.

Mr. Barker asked for clarification as to why this is still a concern when it has been addressed.

City Manager Bohenko explained that the City has received a call from the State Attorney General Office regarding this issue because it is expressly prohibited by the Prescott Sisters will. He stated it has to be addressed but we are not going to start checking people's bags. He concluded that there are many positive things that have occurred, with some other issues still needing to be addressed including a more robust emergency access plan.

Mr. French agrees that things have been going well so far and there has been communication and less tension while trying to balance between a successful festival and a happy community.

Councilor Dwyer stated another issue that still needs to be addressed is parking and specifically Water Street. City Manager Bohenko stated we are looking at a permit system and feels that the parking at Strawberry Banke has helped as well. He stated that people are also parking at City Hall and Little Harbour School and walking to the park. He stated that we will be taking readings of the traffic and have those figures at the end of the season as well.

Assistant City Manager Moore asked for a breakdown of the variables.

Mr. French explained that 25% revenue comes from the gates and 25% from sponsors. He continued that sponsors give their donations based on the quality of the concerts and if the quality was less, they wouldn't give as much. He continued that the reason that concerts are on Wednesday nights is because the acts are less expensive on a Wednesday than they would be on a weekend night. He stated that there is always an uncertainty of what the crowds will be for various reasons. He stated that they try to have 4-5 "anchor" groups to help cover the costs of the lesser known groups. He stated that this is not an easy business to run because of all of the moving parts and unpredictability that comes from an outside venue. He concluded by stating that they will be providing this information in an excel spreadsheet.

City Manager Bohenko stated that although it had been discussed with him by Ben Anderson prior to this season beginning, he would not like to see 3 concerts scheduled in the opening week in the future as it was too intense. Mr. French stated he agrees but this was a situation where availability of the acts and flexibility of scheduling

came into play. He stated that only being able to schedule concerts on Wednesdays would kill the festival.

Councilor Dwyer asked if there could be a trade-off by allowing the concerts to continue past the Labor Day weekend on weekends only to address the issue of intensity and also to take advantage of the good weather in the fall.

Mr. Anderson stated this is an interesting idea to explore but there would be staffing issues as many of the staff go back to school and feels that families are back into their normal routines of the school year. He stated they did try to do this 5 years ago, but did not have good attendance.

Ms. Lurie-Meyerkopf stated that Strawberry Banke holds various events in the fall and we wouldn't want to compete with those.

Discussion ensued on the remaining issues outlined in the handout including intensity of schedule, sound, potential of additional dark night.

Mr. French stated that if an additional dark night is added they would have to take something away and they had to take away movie night, it may impact negatively on the Festival.

Assistant City Manager Moore stated that would be a choice and isn't the only choice.

Mr. Barker stated that he lives across the street and finds that it feels less safe at night when there is nothing going on in the Park.

Councilor Dwyer stated that other cities actually put money into their Arts and wonders if we did that to allow for an additional dark night.

Mr. Anderson stated that the financial aspect is a part of it, but is not the only issue as for example, the movie nights allows another option for people to enjoy the park that may not have the means for other types of arts offered in the City.

Mr. French stated that accessibility of Art to all people is important and is why the PPAF was started in the first place. He continued that this is sometimes children's first exposure to the arts and the provide quality that is relatively inexpensive and people don't have to donate. He stated that the PPAF has worked incredibly hard to build the Arts community and do not receive subsidies from the City and feels that if restrictions are imposed it will have an impact on sponsorships etc.

Chair Watson suggested that in terms of flexibility, the movies could be held at an alternate location e.g., South Playground.

Councilor Dwyer agreed stating that there are several public spaces in the works and the amenities needed for these types of events could be worked into the spaces.

Ms. Aichele agrees stating that Trustees of the Trust Funds began having the plays began in Prescott Park and it has now become synonymous with Prescott Park, but it is a separate entity and these events could be held in other areas of the city.

Mr. Anderson stated that the movies can be shown anywhere, but there is an investment in the equipment and concession stand in the Park.

Chair Watson asked Mr. Anderson to put together a cost model of holding the movies in another location.

Further discussion ensued regarding physical location and developing other areas in the city.

Mr. Barker stated that the Prescott Park Arts Festival offers 100% free Arts to the City and understands that it needs to be balanced with the impact on the community. He stated we don't know the financial impact of cutting back yet, but do we want to pay them to cut back on the events? He stated that he likes the life in the neighborhood but agrees the conversation needs to be held.

City Manager Bohenko clarified that the City does provide various services and items already and if the city were to start paying for the programming they may not select the same programming.

Mr. French then addressed the performance times stating that again the movie night would be affected as they cannot start until dark and do not get out by 10:00 p.m.

Ms. Lurie-Meyerkopf suggested exempting movie night.

Regarding the use of local talent, Mr. French stated that it is not the mission of the PPAF, but to have access to quality performances.

Councilor Dwyer stated there has been a lot of pushback from the Arts community so we need to figure out how to specify a certain number of local opportunities which do already happen, but it needs to be formalized.

Mr. French stated it does conflict with all of the issues, so a balance needs to be met.

#### 4. Adjournment

Chair Watson announced that the next meeting is scheduled for July 19, 2017 and will begin with Public Comment followed by committee discussion on scheduling parameters.

Meeting adjourned at 9:05 a.m.