MINUTES
MAYOR’S BLUE RIBBON COMMITTEE
PRESCOTT PARK POLICY ADVISORY COMMITTEE
7:30 A.M. – Friday, May 26, 2017
Conference Room A
Portsmouth City Hall

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

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

1. Call to Order and Introduction of Committee Members

Chair Watson called the meeting to order at 7:35 a.m.

2. Consideration of Meeting Minutes – April 26, 2017

Councilor Dwyer moved to accept the Meeting Minutes of April 26, 2017, seconded by Mr. Gordon. Motion to accept the minutes passed unanimously.

3. Committee Discussion: 2018 Event and Performance Schedule in Prescott park

Assistant City Manager Moore gave a brief update of the current activities of the Gundalow Company and NH Arts Association and the adjustments made to the Shaw Warehouse to help reduce the backstage area of the Prescott Parks Arts Festival. He continued that the City Council recently approved the funding of a Sound Engineer for the upcoming season. Finally, he stated that there is an inquiry from the PPAF regarding a poetry offering to be held prior to the Thursday performances from 5:45 – 6:15 p.m. and is in partnership with Poet Laureate Mike Nelson who will be the emcee. He stated the content will be crowd appropriate.

City Manager Bohenko stated he received the request from Ben Anderson and is looking for feedback from the committee as he feels it does fit into the mission of Arts and Culture in the park and would be a positive activity.

Mr. Gordon stated he likes the idea and it is low impact on the Park.

Ms. Aichele asked if there would be music involved and upon being answered no, she stated she likes the idea as well.

Councilor Dwyer stated it is a good idea, but is concerned with the environment at that time before a show as people will be coming in for the show, going to the concession, etc. and may not be paying attention to the performer which may be a negative experience for the poet.

Chair Watson stated that he feels it is worth trying out this year as long as it doesn’t delay the start time of the show itself.

City Manager Bohenko stated he agrees that it can be a trial run for this year and also wants to ensure that it is not a negative experience to the poet.

Chair Watson referred to the handout regarding Performance and Event Schedule Topics stating that this is a guideline for discussion of all 3 organization agreements and can be amended as needed. He stated the committee can then come back to this after this upcoming season and make recommendations for 2018 in August.

Assistant City Manager Moore stated he tried to capture the comments and concerns raised by the committee
and establish the parameters for the schedule. He then reviewed the document outline.

City Manager Bohenko stated that if the school calendar is used as a guideline for the season, it should be the adopted, published school year with the understanding that snow days can extend it after the fact.

Councilor Dwyer stated that this should only pertain to live, evening performances because the Gundalow Company season runs differently and the weather is still summer-like into September. She stated she would like to see a way to spread the events out into the early Fall as well as providing more daytime performances for children.

Mr. Barker stated he would like clarification as to what this discussion is really addressing and if it is specific to the Prescott Park Arts Festival, it should be so noted.

Assistant City Manager Moore stated this outline was created with live events in mind and agrees that should be noted so as to not bog down the conversation.

Chair Watson stated that other events would go to the City Manager for special permission.

Assistant City Manager Moore further explained that the current operating agreement for Prescott Park Arts Festival makes it the only Arts Culture programming in the Park because of the stage, etc. so this needs to be worked through as to whether or not this should continue.

City Manager Bohenko stated it is too early to make that policy change and the conversation needs to be held with PPAF first and maybe looking at something outside of their agreed upon timeframe.

Discussion ensued regarding the need to balance the schedule with the wear and tear of the park, neighborhood, parking issues, etc. and how to set parameters without micromanaging.

Chair Watson stated that ultimately we have to have an agreement and a way to get to that agreement.

City Manager Bohenko stated he wants parameters for the Prescott Park Arts Festival but also for other groups that may want to use it. He stated he would like to have Ben Anderson and staff a part of the next discussion so it is more productive and maybe start categorizing the acts as previously requested.

Mr. Gordon stated that intensity of use is key to the conversation as well and how long it takes to recover after a high intensity event.

City Manager Bohenko stated he would also like to bring in the Public Works Director and General Foreman to discuss the maintenance issues as well as other bigger issues in the park i.e. seawall repair and any possible disruption.

Councilor Dwyer stated that Weston and Sampson had addressed the issue of resting periods between events during the Master Plan process and the requirements in the new park will be different than what we are dealing with now.

Assistant City Manager Moore stated that we will be collecting data this summer on a monthly basis to be able to give real time statistics as part of the “living laboratory” for the upcoming season.

4. Committee Next Steps
Chair Watson stated that this has been a great conversation and although the committee only touched briefly on items B and C, the discussion has been reframed. He suggested that the Public Works staff come to a meeting sometime towards the middle of the summer.

5. Public Comment

Chair Watson opened the Public Comment stating that comments should pertain to the discussion topics of today’s meeting.

Beth Margeson – discussed the schedule stating it has expanded over the years and would like to see other groups be able to use it as well. She continued that if the school calendar is used as a guideline for the season, then 3 days should be added as a buffer for snow days. She continued that she is sad that “Shakespeare in the Park” will not be held this year as it was a local Arts group and one of the least intrusive. She asked for clarification that only non-profit groups can use the park. Chair Watson stated it is a part of the PPAF agreement. Ms. Margeson continued that she would like to see at least 2 dark days per week as there used to be 3 and now only 1. She concluded that programming choices is how to control the crowds and suggested that acts such as Aaron Neville and Amy Mann are too popular for this venue.

Mike Conaboy – stated he is concerned with the parking issue and people parking on the narrow neighboring streets as this is a safety issue with fire trucks not being able to fit.

Judy Nerbonne – stated that there has been an increase in activities at the Park over the years and she is interested in hearing from the Public Works Department.

Arthur Clough – addressed his ongoing concerns with alcohol use in the Park during events and the ordinance not being enforced.

After an objection from the audience, Chair Watson asked Mr. Clough to limit his comments to the topic discussed today.

Mr. Clough stated he has the right to address the issue of alcohol use in the Park and it is pertinent to the discussion.

City Manager Bohenko stated that he has met with Police Chief Mara and will meet with the new Police Chief as well regarding enforcement of the ordinance in the upcoming season. He concluded that he can’t do anything about the past but going forward it will be addressed.

Mr. Clough addressed the trash he has seen on the grounds after events and also that he would like himself and his family to be able to use the park without feeling intimidated and harassed. He concluded stating that if the organization fails to live up to their part of the agreement then they should lose their contract.

Brian Kelly – stated he would caution against trying to enforce intensity of an event as you can’t turn people away at the gate and there are variables involved including weather, popularity of an act at any given time, etc. He stated that could end up making it look like the organization isn’t in compliance with the agreement. Next he discussed having Prescott Park Arts Festival as the “umbrella” organization for other non-profit groups to use the park because they have the infrastructure in place as well as an experienced staff.

City Manager Bohenko excused himself at 9:00 a.m. due to another meeting.

Mr. Kelly concluded by discussing sustainability of the park, impact of revenues and reduction of expenses.
Kathleen Cavalaro – requested that Chair Watson require speakers to follow a code of conduct during public comment.

Dan Corcoran – stated that Prescott Park is a park and not a revenue generator. He stated that after events, the park is an embarrassment and should be maintained as a source of pride. He stated that parking has been an issue and will be even more so without Water Street and Peirce Island and would like Prescott Park Arts Festival to address how they will handle parking.

6. Adjournment

Following discussion of the committee, Chair Watson announced that the next meeting dates will be June 7th and June 21st.

Meeting adjourned at 9:10 a.m.