MINUTES

MAYOR’S BLUE RIBBON COMMITTEE
PRESCOTT PARK POLICY ADVISORY COMMITTEE
7:30 A.M. – Thursday, March 30, 2017
City Council Chambers
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 7:30 a.m.

2. Consideration of Meeting Minutes – March 9, 2017

Ms. Aichele moved to accept the Meeting Minutes of March 9, 2017. Seconded by Mr. Barker and passed unanimously.

3. License Agreement Updates for 2017

A. Prescott Park Arts Festival (Schedule Discussion)

The City Manager delivered some preliminary remarks about preparations for the 2017 season and the need to look ahead to the 2018 season. Both he and Assistant City Manager Moore recognized the Prescott Park Arts Festival for their submittal of a thorough schedule description for the City’s consideration. He indicated this effort at collecting more information about the schedule is in keeping with the intention to have clarity about Park for the 2017 season for all users and the public. He continued that the schedule will become part of the letter of agreement and will be monitored as the season goes along.

City Manager Bohenko stated that the Prescott Park Arts Festival will have police in attendance at their events and all rules will be enforced i.e., placement of blankets, end times, etc.

Chair Watson asked Ben Anderson of the Prescott Park Arts Festival to come forward to give input as the discussion ensued.

Mr. Gordon stated that he finds the information very helpful but would like to also have data regarding the volume of the events as that is the concern of the neighbors and abutters.

City Manager Bohenko stated that there were reports done last year on decibel levels last year and suggested that a staff person could be assigned to do sound checks, but we would need to get good equipment to do it. He continued that this needs to be a cooperative effort and would like people to have patience this upcoming season as we find the tools to make the experience good for everyone.

Mr. Gordon stated that the “bowl” area may address crowd size, but he is still concerned with the sound volume levels.
Councilor Dwyer stated that there are 2 types of problems to anticipate; the first being the month of July having a very intense schedule and an increased number of concerts. She stated this has an impact of the parking and traffic in the neighborhoods as well. She stated that different types of concerns attract different amounts of people. She indicated she would like to see fewer concerts noting there was an increase shown in concert numbers. She stated she would also like some type of rating system of events in regards to how many people they may attract, etc. She concluded, stating that she would also like to see an earlier start time than 8:00 p.m. for the Mary Poppins play as it is a longer show.

City Manager Bohenko explained that the city is going to have the July 4th celebration on July 3rd at Leary Field including a concert and fireworks so the PPAF will not be scheduling anything for that time. He continued that he agrees that the concerts have to be reviewed and define what a good amount will be and define that in a letter to the PPAF by early September so they can plan their 2018 schedule.

Chair Watson stated that the Prescott Park Master Plan Committee already received a lot of input and know what the Park can and can’t do in regards to capacity and now we have to find where the Arts Festival fits into that capacity and is why we need to differentiate between the types of events.

Ms. Lurie-Meyerkopf asked if the theater camp has any impact on the neighbors.

PPAF President Ben Anderson stated that the theater camp makes the July schedule look fuller and continued that it is a great program for approximately 40 kids. He stated that it is low impact on the neighborhood and the kids are not always in the park. He then addressed the start time of 8:00 p.m. for the plays stating that is due to the theatrical lighting component. He stated that Thursday and Sundays are earlier shows for kids and families.

City Manager Bohenko encouraged Mr. Anderson to take the idea back to the Board and see if shows later in the season could be moved up to an earlier start time.

Mr. Gordon stated that the Master Plan encourages looking at changes in the park that will lower the impact of large concerts for the health of the park and feels that volume must be factored in as well. He stated if we can implement the changes in the Master Plan, then the number of events becomes less important because it will have less impact.

More Committee discussion took place about “dark” nights in the Park, where there is an absence of Festival programming. The schedule presented included two events on Tuesday nights, whereas in the previous year there was no programming on Tuesday nights. Mr. Barker indicated he thought it was important for the public to have predictability in the “dark” night in the Park.

City Manager Bohenko stated he agrees that we will look at the Master Plan and what is intended to make these a part of the agreements in 2018. He reiterated the importance of bringing the proposal to PPAF by early September and finalizing in October for planning purposes.

Ms. Aichele stated she agrees that the 2018 agreements need to be done as early as possible for scheduling purposes. Next, she suggested having 2 days a week where there are no events at all scheduled so that people can know that is when they can go to the park and give neighbors a break.

City Manager Bohenko stated this will be the first year that the city will have oversight of the maintenance of the park and will be talking to the Dept. of Public Works about aerating the turf in early spring and late fall. He further stated that he would like to have tarps banned.

Discussion continued regarding events scheduling and park impacts.
City Manager Bohenko reviewed the issues of concern:

- Creating a graph of last year’s volume/decibel history
- 2018 schedule – intensity of July schedule and consideration of one/two dark nights a week
- Rating of concerts in terms of park/neighborhood impact (ex. level A concerts, level B concert)
- Camps do not have much impact, during the day with 40 children
- Aeration of the lawn area, and implementing a no tarps policy
- 2018 schedule – start schedule a week later than published end of school date
- 2018 schedule – review intensity of June schedule
- Have a good template in place from 2018 going forward available the September before
- Beginning plays at 7:00 p.m.

He continued that he understands that there will be some frustration with the 2017 schedule but we are looking at the long plan and working on having a good mixture for those visiting and living in the City.

Discussion ensued regarding the implementation of the Master Plan and any possible disruption of the schedule.

City Manager Bohenko explained that money will be programmed within the CIP and there may be donations as well. He continued that a lot of the initial phasing will be work below grade and there will be coordination with everyone involved.

B. Update: Gundalow Company

Assistant City Manager Moore reviewed the history of the Gundalow Company use of Prescott Park stating they had been working under a multi-year contract which expired in 2016. He continued that they have been in discussion for the upcoming season and they have requested a couple of changes including the use of the Sheafe Warehouse building for public educational programming when not being used by the NH Arts Association. Secondly, they are looking at being able to better communicate the availability of their services and provide convenience to the public by having a small table, chair and umbrella that can be set up and taken down every day.

Molly Bolster, Director of the Gundalow Company, explained the process they have for dealing with the many school field trips they host and having to limit to one class at a time. She further explained their partnership with Strawbery Banke and that the Gundalow Camp summer camp program which has very little impact on the Park on a daily basis.

Assistant City Manager Moore stated that a similar process of meeting with and planning for 2017 with the NH Art Association is taking place and he and the City Manager will come back to the Committee at their next meeting with more information.

4. Planning for 2018

Chair Watson explained that for future meetings he would like to discuss various components of the agreements including, scheduling, signage and merchandising, use of buildings, fee structures, etc. so that by the fall, City Manager Bohenko will have the information needed in order to commence license agreement planning with the formal park users. He stated it will also be important to allow users to participate throughout the process as well as the neighbors and members of the public. He indicated the Committee will work on planning out this work in future meetings. He solicited in put on the proposed approach which was well received.

Councilor Dwyer suggested adding physical improvements i.e., back of stage, warehouse uses, etc.
5. Public Comment

Beth Margeson – distributed a PPAF schedule breakdown showing the increase of usage in the park. She further stated that she is frustrated with the 2017 schedule and would like to see movie night eliminated stating that it starts late and does have an impact on the neighborhood. She discussed the ongoing noise issue stating that courtesy and consideration go a long way but also feels that the city should hire an engineer. She concluded by stating that alcohol was also a problem last year and feels that enforcement is needed and clear and consistent guidelines put in place.

Ben Anderson – stated he is frustrated that after all of the progress that is made during the meetings, they end with misinformation. He stated that movie nights were a key part of the PPAF in the ‘90’s and it is the locals who come and there are none scheduled for June. He stated that the PPAF hasn’t grown, it has been restored.

6. Adjournment

Chair Watson announced that the next meeting will be held Thursday, April 13th at 7:30 a.m.

Meeting adjourned at 9:00 a.m.