



**COUNTY COMMISSIONERS OF KENT COUNTY, MARYLAND  
DEPARTMENT OF PARKS & RECREATION  
ADVISORY BOARD MEETING**



Kent County Community Center \* 11041 Worton Rd., Worton \* MD 21678

**Microsoft Teams Video Conference  
February 7, 2022, at 6:00 PM**

**MINUTES**

In Attendance: Myra Butler, Mary Fisher, Commissioner Bob Jacob, Nivek Johnson, Faye Little, Mike Moulds, Greg Welch, Jr., and Guest Speakers Kat Stork Blaher and Kim Duncan from Shore Strategies, LLC.

Absent: Melinda Bookwalter, Melissa Cannon, Joyce Moody, and Penny Usilton.

**CALL TO ORDER**

Ms. Fisher called the meeting to order at 6:01 pm.

**GUEST SPEAKER(S): Land Preservation, Parks and Recreation (LPPR) Plan Presentation**

Kat Stork Blaher and Kim Duncan from Shore Strategies, LLC presented the Kent County Land Preservation, Parks and Recreation Plan development update process. The following information was shared at the meeting:

- The LPPR Plan is a requirement of the State as a condition for Kent County to receive Program Open Space funding, as well as the Land and Water Conservation Fund financial support that is passed down from the Federal level to the State level for passing down to the counties whenever possible.
- The LPPR document contains four chapters: Chapter 1 contains the general framework such as the background data and demographics for Kent County; Chapter 2, the focus of this evening’s presentation, contains Parks and Recreation data; and Chapters 3 and 4, focus on Natural Resource Land Conservation, and Agricultural Land Preservation.
- The process for updating the Plan began approximately one year ago, and between June 1 – June 31, collaboration began with Kent County Parks and Recreation staff, Department of Public Works, and the Department of Planning, Housing, and Zoning. Ms. Stork Blaher gave a special thanks to Mr. Moulds’ staff (Mark, Mike, and Jim) for gathering information and for showing her the County’s parks; and a special thanks to Carla Gerber and Allie Gorman in the Planning Department who assisted with compiling the maps and providing the inventory of the open spaces within the County.
- The key areas of focus were availability, accessibility, amenities, and features within the parks. On the recreation side, the focus is on availability, accessibility, and how program offerings aligned with community outreach.
- There are four components: A (broad) community engagement, a community survey, a tour of the County’s five municipalities and speaking directly with the residents, and review of all inventory of all parks and open spaces, proximity, and equity analysis. Following are some of the responses received back from the community:
  - Overall respondents were pleased with how things are geographically.
  - Overall respondents were satisfied with parks maintenance.
  - There are requests for more walking trail opportunities within the County, including rails-to-trails.
  - There is a desire to see more restroom facilities or porta potties for year-round use.
  - The need for additional signage for directing people to parks and open spaces.
  - The desire for activities associated with water: For example, boating, kayaking, fishing, wading.
  - The responses pertaining to youth and adult interests for sports and league programs were basketball, baseball, softball, soccer, tennis, and pickleball.

- Overall, in review of the maps and discussion within the focus groups pertaining to walkability to parks, the County demonstrated equitable access to parks and scored in the low-medium need range.
- Based on what was expressed at the community meetings and responses to the surveys, Parks and Recreation staff developed the following goals:
  - Continue to enhance recreational programs and review different opportunities.
  - Enhance existing parks and facilities within the County.
  - Promote preservation and use of open space in a way that it aligns with the County's Comprehensive Plan.
  - Focus on increasing opportunities for its youth in the middle school programs.
  - Recruit and retrain staff.
- The Parks and Recreation team developed a 5-year capital improvement plan for investing Open Space funding on the following list of projects:
  - Betterton Beach: Continue rehabilitation work on the pavilion and boardwalk.
  - Edesville Park: Rehabilitate the volleyball court/convert to sand volleyball.
  - Still Pond Station Park: Complete a master plan.
  - Toal Park: Rehabilitate the ballfield and some of the trails.
  - Turners Creek Park: Complete a master plan for redevelopment.
  - Worton Park: Rehabilitate the playground, pavilion, and ballfield.
  - Rehabilitate the Millington and Worton pools.
- Capital priorities for Kent County's municipalities:
  - Betterton is planning to rehab its tennis and pickleball courts, basketball courts, and a walking path development.
  - Chestertown is planning to start (or has already begun) its Ajax, Wilmer, and the Gilcrest rail-to-trail extension.
  - Galena is looking at new park signage and is in discussions with the State Highway Administration and the County Commissioners on a large-scale walkability project.
  - Rock Hall is looking at doing rehabilitation work around its Civic Center and doing restroom upgrades.

In closing, Ms. Stork Blaher talked about the Plan's next steps. She said a draft of the Plan is currently being reviewed by the State, and they hope to receive it back by February 15<sup>th</sup>. She said once revisions have been made, there will be a public comment period, followed by a review by the Planning Commission who will then make a recommendation to the County Commissioners.

**OLD BUSINESS**

**Recreation**

**Full Time Staff Updates (Old and New)**

- Ms. Butler announced the following Parks and Recreation full time staff changes:
  - Sandy Adams was introduced as the most recent staff member to join the Parks and Recreation team. Sandy joins the team as an administrative specialist II and replaces Tonya Thomas who transferred to Human Resources.
  - Haili Walbert transitioned into her new role at Parks and Recreation as an administrative specialist.
  - Rachael Krueger, a seasonal staff member who has been with Parks and Recreation over the course of several summers, has transitioned into a full-time role as a facility monitor.
  - Josh Iseman, who previously served for two summers as our Betterton Beach supervisor and before that as a camp counselor, has transitioned into a full-time role as a facility monitor.
  - Jessica Plum rejoined the team in early July 2021 as a program coordinator in sports and aquatics.

- Michelle Morgan joined the team in early December as a program coordinator for after school summer camps, activity classes, and special events.
- Jill Coleman remains with the team as recreation supervisor.

Ms. Butler said she considers herself as a “lifer” with the Parks and Recreation team, and this is a great opportunity to come together as a new team, to be innovative in our thinking and our programming, and to think about how best to move forward with programs for our youth and partnering with our municipalities.

### **FY22 Capital Projects**

- Work will be completed at the Worton Community Center and Millington pools. Ms. Butler said part of the approval in this fiscal year’s budget was for replastering the pool at both locations, but because these will be completed at the very end of the LPPRP being due, there is mention of those projects in this current draft plan but will speak more to the completion and the actual reaching of the goal as part of the next update of the plan in 2027. She said we are hoping to get these two specific projects done in time for the summer season.
- By spring this fiscal year, shelving will be installed in the storage room at the Community Center pool area; the storage room will serve as a storage area for equipment (out of season) and a break room area (in season) for the lifeguards.

### **Department Operations**

- This past season, Parks and Recreation partnered with Queen Anne’s County and offered a youth basketball program, and it has worked out well; it offered a much larger competitive field of play with a larger number of teams.
- The pickleball program is still up and running; we have morning, afternoon, evening, and Saturday offerings.
- Ping Pong is still being offered.

### **Parks**

#### **Local Parks & Playground Infrastructure Grant Projects Status**

- The State of Maryland through surplus funds awarded Kent County \$1M for investing in our parks. The County Commissioners elected to share the funding with the municipalities who had needs and made requests to receive the funding. The County’s park projects totaled over \$555,000 and the requests made by the municipalities (Betterton, Chestertown, and Rock Hall) totaled a little over \$444,000; the towns of Galena and Millington did not submit funding requests for this opportunity. On February 16<sup>th</sup>, these projects will be on the State Board of Public Works’ agenda to be approved.

#### **Program Open Space Grant Projects Status**

- **The following projects are impending:**
  - Toal Park Rehabilitation: New park benches will be installed near the playground and fencing improvements will be made to the lower ballfield.
  - Worton Park Rehabilitation: Sunshades will be added to six ballfields, along with digital message signage; benches will be installed around the fitness walking path; and fencing improvements will be made at five of the ballfields.

### **Other**

#### **Future LPPRP Planning Grant (Program Open Space Grant)**

- Each year \$25,000 is requested towards Planning and for work towards how we will be strategic in meeting our goals, increase programming, partnerships, and opportunities in parks.

### **NEW BUSINESS**

#### **Recreation**

##### **Youth Sports Equipment Grant Funding Requests**

- Three requests for funding have been received from three youth sports organizations:
  - Kent Youth Lacrosse requested funding for \$4,208

- Youth Baseball Organization \$3,260.06
- Youth Football and Cheer (Kent County Spartans) for \$6,000

Ms. Butler reminded the Board that last February they made the decision to reduce this program from two funding cycles per year which totaled \$20,000, down to one funding cycle per year which now totals \$10,000.

Ms. Butler made a motion to fund the Youth Baseball Organization \$3,260 and to split the balance of the remaining funds between the football and lacrosse organizations at \$3,370 each, and Ms. Little seconded the motion; two members abstained, the motion passed by majority.

Ms. Butler informed the Board that she will send the award notification letters out to each of the organizations this week.

#### **Kent County Youth Softball League Administration**

- Ms. Butler said the Kent County Youth Softball league has been transitioned over to Parks and Recreation to administer the program. She said Parks and Recreation is currently accepting registrations and that Mr. Joe Goetz is working with Parks and Recreation staff to ensure a seamless transition.

#### **Future of Sassafras Environmental Education Center**

- Ms. Butler informed the Board that there is a potential opportunity with the Sassafras Environmental Education Center, formerly under the leadership of former Congressman Wayne Gilchrest. She said Mr. Gilchrest has retired, and he asked the County to consider taking over administering the program. She said the program has a focus on outdoor education and is an outdoor classroom that helps KCPS in meeting the state educational requirement for Children in Nature. Ms. Butler said if the program comes to fruition for Parks and Recreation, she believes it will be a good fit and that it will be a new area of focus for the team. Ms. Butler said she will keep the Board apprised as more information develops and becomes available.

#### **Spring/Summer 2022 Schedule of Programs and Activities**

- Parks and Recreation is currently working on the following spring and summer programs: Summer camp, swim lessons, partner events with spring festival, Betterton Beach clean-up, and partner programs with Shore Rivers, and Minary's Dream Alliance; the schedule is due out by end of February/early March.

#### **Aquatics Staffing Challenges and Opportunities**

- Ms. Butler said back in August 2021, she mentioned to the County Commissioners that she would be looking into the option of hiring a pool management company for pool staffing at the County's swimming pool facilities. She informed the Board that both Dorchester and Talbot counties have had to outsource staffing for their facilities as well. She said the County's pools were not open in 2020 due to the Corona Virus pandemic and due to staffing issues, and only one pool was open in 2021. Since then, she has requested quotes from three pool management companies and has received a quote back from two of the companies: One quote is for \$210,000 for staffing all three pools, but it does not include lifeguards at Betterton Beach; and the other quote is for \$172,000 which includes staffing all three pools, swim instructors for providing swimming lessons, and lifeguards at Betterton Beach. Ms. Butler, comparing the budget quotes, said the County's budget for staffing the three pools and for providing lifeguards at Betterton Beach is \$208,000. Ms. Butler said within the next couple of weeks, she will move forward with a proposal to the County Commissioners and provide recommendations for opening all three pools and a lifeguard at Betterton Beach utilizing a pool management company.

#### **Parks**

- Department of Public Works Director Mike Moulds had nothing further to report.

## Other

### **Kent County YMCA**

- Ms. Butler said since the YMCA opened in early January and as we move forward in planning over the next five years, we must look at how we need to pivot with regards to what we offer in programming. She said rather than calling the new YMCA and the impact it has on Parks and Recreation a “challenge”, she prefers to look at it as new opportunities. She said we will be looking at more programming in parks, along with partnering with the municipalities. She also pointed out that the County still has its swimming pools, summer camp programs, and the Community Center is back to full programming.

## REPORTS

Chair/Toal Park:	Mary Fisher Nothing to report
Vice-Chair/Worton Park:	Faye J. Little Nothing to report
Bayside Landing Park:	Penny Usilton No report
Betterton Beach:	Greg Welch Mr. Welch commented on the steps to the pavilion that have just been completed. He said, “they look amazing.”
Millington Pool:	Melissa Cannon No Report
Edesville Park:	Joyce B. Moody No Report
Turners Creek Park:	Melinda Bookwalter No Report
High School:	Vacant
High School:	Vacant
County Commissioner:	Bob Jacob Nothing to report
Board of Education:	Nivek Johnson Mr. Johnson commented that it is always good partnering with Kent County Parks and Recreation. Mr. Johnson said to let them know how we can continue to work together.
Public Works:	Mike Moulds Mr. Moulds commented on the grant funding that is being sought for extending the Town of Galena to Toal Park via utilizing the State Highway Administration’s right-of-way. He said eventually they want to get the trail extended down to Georgetown and from the school to the town and park. Mr. Moulds said the project will be done in several phases.

Ms. Butler informed the Board that to help with county-wide staffing challenges, the County Commissioners recently approved a 6% increase for all full-time county employees and a (slightly above) 6% increase for seasonal staff. On behalf of the employees, Ms. Butler thanked the Commissioners for the increase.

Ms. Butler thanked the Board for their continued service.

**ADJOURNMENT**

Ms. Butler made a motion to adjourn the meeting and Commissioner Jacob seconded the motion; the meeting was adjourned at 7:19 p.m.

**NEXT MEETING: Monday, May 16, 2022**