



WORK SESSION of the Greenbelt City Council held Wednesday, November 30, 2005, for the purpose of discussing Recreation Department Revenues.

Mayor Davis started the meeting at 8:03p.m. It was held in the Multi-Purpose Room of the Community Center.

PRESENT WERE: Councilmembers Leta Mach, Edward Putens, Rodney Roberts, and Mayor Judith Davis.

STAFF PRESENT WERE: Hank Irving, Director of Recreation; Joe McNeal, Assistant Director of Recreation; Julie McHale, Assistant Director of Recreation; Nicole DeWald, Arts Supervisor; Michael McLaughlin, City Manager and David E. Moran, Assistant City Manager.

ALSO PRESENT WERE: Sheldon Goldberg, APB; Clement Lau, PRAB and Matthew Johnson, Greenbelt News Review

Mr. McLaughlin began by summarizing the key reasons for revenues being down. He stated that 2001 may have been a bad year to start the comparison. Revenues were artificially high that year due to one-time accounting changes. There had also been a discontinuation of the GOAL program and softball revenues are also down. Finally he noted the impact of the policy change on daily admissions at the Aquatic and Fitness Center.

Mr. Irving stated that the Department regularly checks with their counterparts in other jurisdictions and they were experiencing similar problems. He indicated that it wasn't so much that revenues were down, but that expenses had increased faster than revenues. He appreciated the opportunity to meet with Council to discuss these issues.

Mr. McNeal provided a powerpoint presentation. The presentation highlighted the history of revenues, which have increased about 1% annually since FY 1999. However, expenditures had increased much faster. He identified increases in facility maintenance, utilities, employee benefits and insurance as the main causes of the increases.

Mr. McNeal reported that the Aquatic and Fitness Center was the largest revenue generator for the Department and during the past seven fiscal years it has gone from covering 84% of its operating costs to 66%. This was attributed to increased mechanical repairs, utilities and employee benefits. He noted that Community Center revenues were increasing slowly. Recreation Center revenues showed significant fluctuations since FY 2000.

Ms. McHale summarized changes in programs that affected revenues. She noted that self supporting revenues since FY 03 would have "held the line" if you add the cost of the GOAL program back in to the totals. She presented some of the concerns and comments received about program activities.

Council asked if the opening of Curves had impacted fitness classes. Recreation staff responded that there had not been a significant impact. However Mr. Irving noted that ten years ago Curves, Bally's and Gold's Gym did not exist and the Aquatic & Fitness Center was the only gym in town. He believed this had probably had some impact.

There was discussion about arts programs. Ms. DeWald stated that while revenues were not increasing attendance figures were way up largely in the free or grant funded programs. It was noted that Ceramics account for a significant portion of arts revenues since there is a dedicated Ceramic studio.

Mr. McNeal presented five recommendations which included: focus on enhanced marketing strategies; conduct additional program and user surveys, ensure competitive and appropriate fees; work to reduce costs and pursue corporate sponsorship.

Mayor Davis asked if the Department had considered downsizing programs or staff. Ms. McHale responded that since the Self Supporting Budget had been broken down into various smaller budgets, classes were now required to at least break even.

Ms. Mach asked which facilities, fields, etc. were charged for and which were provided for free. Mr. McNeal responded by explaining the various facilities worked. It was noted Recreation and Contributions Groups were able to utilize most facilities for free.

Council suggested the Department consider offering vacant camp or class slots to City employees or volunteers at a reduced rate.

Mr. Lau indicated that as a resident, member of PRAB and a regular user of the Aquatic & Fitness Center he wanted to improve City services. He presented comments based on his observations. He noted the number of attendees at the Aquatic & Fitness Center was going down and that the City needed to work to bring people back to the facility. Mr. Lau liked the survey recommendations, in particular reaching out to people who are not coming to the facility. He suggested better promotion of programs like family night. Mr. Lau noted an instance of inappropriate behavior by pool employees. He also believed the pool was getting dirtier. Mr. Irving responded that these were exceptions not the rule and requested that Mr. Lau bring these matters to Staff's attention immediately when they occur. Council suggested he provide the specifics of these situations to Mr. Irving and staff would respond.

Mr. McLaughlin raised the issue of the Recreation Coordinator position which was approved in the FY 2006 Budget, but only funded for six months and scheduled to begin on January 1. Council indicated that the City should fill the position.

Information Items

Ms. Mach noted that the Senior Citizen Advisory Committee was concerned about a new member who was not attending meetings. Mr. Putens asked about a depression in the road on Westway. Mr. McLaughlin noted this was WSSC repair that the City would monitor.

The meeting ended at 10:40p.m.

Respectfully submitted,

*David E. Moran
Assistant City Manager*