

Parks & Leisure Public Forum
March 3, 2015 * CSU Meeting & Training Facility

City Manager Kelly Templin welcomed everyone to the forum. He outlined the role of the Citizens Advisory Committee and explained the overall process. Templin said if there is an election in November, the city council will need to call the election in August. He said the purpose of tonight's meeting was to get public input about possible bond items.

Committee Co-Chair Bill Smith thanked everyone for attending and said they could offer comments tonight or via email.

Subcommittee Co-Chair Marc Chaloupka introduced subcommittee members.

Co-Chair Jon Denton discussed the previous night's forum on facilities and talked about the city's anticipated population growth. He mentioned the suggestion from the facilities forum about a community center.

Denton said the forum would start with ideas and discussion from citizens, then the subcommittee would discuss some of the projects it has had preliminary discussions about.

Subcommittee members Sherry Ellison and Don Hellriegel were selected to facilitate conversation.

Citizen Comments

Franklin Maslow

Mr. Maslow said he has been a citizen of College Station for 40 years. About four years ago, he became interested in the senior programs. Mr. Maslow said the city's senior coordinator is fantastic. He's also a member of the Senior Advisory Committee. He said the issue is that they are in a small, two-room building off of Rock Prairie Road (Southwood Community Center) that has outdated bathrooms. Mr. Maslow compared this year's participation numbers to the previous year – The bridge section increased from 87 to 107, Sit and Fit went from 125 to 188, line dancing increased from 226 to 369, and dominos had 115 participants.

Another citizen said seniors need a place to go and enjoy themselves and asked for a facility to go along with the wonderful programs provided. He cited the increase in retired persons in the community and pointed out that College Station is rated as a great place to retire. He added that seniors need and deserve a bigger piece of the pie when it comes to recreation and facilities.

A citizen said he has issues with the rooms at the Southwood Community Center that the seniors are currently using. He said the east room has terrible acoustics and the overall quality of the room is poor. He requested interim funding for acoustic needs, and asked what incentives could be put in place to ensure that there are bicycle and walking trails being added by developers. He said we do not want to be considered “the rooftops of College Station.” He also has issues with vandalism and said people are tearing up landscaping, and suggested the addition of security cameras.

A citizen said the Southwood Community Center has a program called Tuesday afternoon jam with people enjoying music for the first time in a very long time. He said unfortunately, poor acoustics are impacting this experience.

Susan Adams said she participates in line dancing, and the acoustics are awful in current facility. She said the room is small, a lot of people attend, and another senior could get knocked over. She suggested that perhaps the city could add on to the current facility and pointed out that seniors are a huge demographic in College Station.

A citizen said Austin has three huge community centers.

Beth Hadden said she lives near Lemontree Park, which has a trailway for bikes and joggers. She’s concerned about the way it has been treated the last few years. Mrs. Hadden said she used to be able to see the creek, but vines have taken over and there are a lot of dead trees. She said it really needs attention. She has called the city a few times when trees have fallen, and the city is really good about picking those up, but the park really needs an overall haircut.

A citizen said she has issues when she does line dancing at Southwood Community Center because she is afraid she will knock someone over. She feels that the current facility is not adequate.

Carl Stewart said he is a realtor who is often asked by seniors where our senior center is. He said a senior center is needed. It would be a facility for seniors to volunteer and needs to be dedicated for the seniors. Mr. Stewart said it would be a worthwhile investment for the city.

A citizen said he recently participated in the Senior Games as a volunteer. He said a senior center would be a unique and wise investment. He added that seniors may be able to fulfill needs that those who work full time may not be able to do.

Marisa Errands said she loves Lick Creek Park, which is an extremely popular area. She said people come to look at birds, run and bike. Mrs. Errands said the parking spaces are full and asked about the possibility of adding another natural area at least the size of Lick Creek Park. She suggested the city work with Texas A&M to find a new area.

Ed Elmore said he is concerned about the soccer fields out at Veterans Park. He said rumor has it that the soccer fields will not be available to local players because the fields will be dedicated to HOT funds. As a result, local recreation would be moved solely to weekdays. Mr. Elmore said moving recreational fields to weeknights would make soccer conflict with other sports. He said there is concern among the soccer community that the fields at veterans would not be available for them to use. If we use bond money, as opposed to HOT funds, to make those fields it would be more accessible to the local teams.

Francesca Escell said her young son plays on a basketball team that has to practice and play in Bryan. She would like the city to consider using more resources for basketball. Mrs. Escell said they have to travel to other cities for basketball tournaments and it would be nice if these tournaments could occur in College Station.

A citizen said the city needs a community botanical gardens or a water park. And we need trees.

A citizen said in regard to Lemontree Park that's it's not a matter of man power, it's a matter of machinery. The city needs a large machine to come in and remove the mass of vines and dead trees.

A citizen backed the idea of a senior center.

David Song said the city needs a natatorium or aquatics center.

A citizen said the city needs a water park that would bring in tourism dollars and revenue. He said such a park could bring more people in during the summer.

A citizen seconded what previous citizen said and suggested a public-private partnership.

Subcommittee Member Hellreigel mentioned that the planned Play for All Park is a public-private partnership. He said it's a wonderful venture that the city has embarked on.

Councilman Karl Mooney said a CVB board is looking at ways to address the need for a senior center, meeting facilities, natatorium, etc. It includes representatives from College Station, Bryan, CSISD, and BISD. They recently took a trip to Round Rock. Small towns have worked alongside the YMCA to get this type of facility with a family pool, competition pool, etc. Mooney said with the growth of the student population, swimmers may not be able to use A&M facilities much longer and pooling resources with various entities to create a large facility would meet such needs.

A citizen replied that the YMCA has a fee and it has a fundraising component.

Mooney replied that the YMCA does not turn anyone away due to lack of funds.

A citizen said YMCA teams are not the select teams

Subcommittee members Keith Roberts and Dan Stribling outlined some of the recommendations they have considered so far:

- Another large, regional park because our parks are so full.
- A community recreation center with plenty of rooms and facilities.
- Restoration of park and playground equipment.
- Trails.
- A water park such as a spray park.
- The possibility of a natatorium.
- Another skate park.

Parks & Recreation Director David Schmitz gave a presentation on what projects the subcommittee has considered so far. He said he would hand out business cards for citizens who would like to address parks concerns.

Schmitz said Parks and Rec has been working with the youth soccer league to work out schedules. He also said that a community recreation center would take care of many needs with programs for all ages. He mentioned that Southeast Community Park would include additional baseball and softball fields.

Schmitz said the subcommittee has discussed system improvements such as park and playground renovations, the addition of lighting to certain parks, parking lot resurfacing and trails.

Greenways Program Manager Vanessa Garza said the Bicycle, Pedestrian, and Greenways Committee is proposing a trail to connect Southwest Parkway to Holleman, and one at Pebble Creek.

Councilman John Nichols asked about parking at Lick Creek Park.

Schmitz said the Lick Creek Park Nature Center is starting to move forward and parking is included as part of that expansion to allow for buses.

Public Works Director Donald Harmon said the city is working on ensuring a reliable water supply before construction of the nature center begins in early summer. He said the project will provide additional parking.

Nichols also asked about the Ringer Library.

Harmon replied that the library is managed by Parks and Recreation and that he oversees capital improvement projects. He said library design will be brought before city council next month and that they are working with library staff to look at operational needs. An internal audit was done to be as efficient and far reaching as possible, and the design effort will take about 4-5 months before we move into construction.

Harmon discussed the renovations to the Lincoln Recreation Center, which will include additional meeting space for people to meet and gather.

Harmon said the Lick Creek Hike and Bike Trail Project extends from Creek View Elementary all the way to Lick Creek Park. He said across from Creek View they are looking at doing a short neighborhood natural trail between Alexandria and Newport. He hopes to start working on this in the spring.

A citizen asked about a large regional park.

Schmitz replied that the city is looking to purchase property in the west but it has become more difficult as development increases.

Subcommittee Member Chris Scotti asked citizens to visit the website for more information and to email additional ideas to the committee.