

CITY OF EAST CHICAGO
BOARD OF PARKS AND RECREATION

Regular Meeting
March 23, 2021

BOARD MEMBERS:

Anthony Serna, President
Rick Rodriguez, Vice President
Valda Lewis, Secretary
Gilberto Cantu
Eugene Austin

STAFF:

Ateria Allen
Dawn Dawkins-Legal
Vanessa Hernandez-Orange

Reported by: Peggy S. LaLonde, CSR, RPR
Fissinger & Associates

Call to Order: 5:00 p.m.

Pledge of Allegiance:

Roll Call:

Present in Chambers: Anthony Serna, Eugene Austin, Rick
Rodriguez

Present Telephonic: Valda Lewis, Gilberto Cantu

Staff Present in Chambers: Ateria Allen
Vanessa Hernandez-Orange

Staff Present Telephonic: Dawn Dawkins, Legal Counsel

CHIEF SERNA: We have a quorum. First we
have approval of March 9, 2021, meeting minutes.
Entertain a motion to approve the March 9, 2021, meeting
minutes.

MS. LEWIS: Move for approval of the
minutes.

MR. CANTU: Second.

CHIEF SERNA: All in favor signify by
saying aye?

(All signify aye.)

CHIEF SERNA: Motion carries.

Next item is approval of the payroll
dated March 19, 2021. Entertain a motion to approve the
payroll.

1 MR. RODRIGUEZ: I make a motion.

2 MS. LEWIS: Second.

3 CHIEF SERNA: All in favor signify by
saying aye?

4 (All signify aye.)

CHIEF SERNA: Motion carries.

5 Next we have approval of Warrant
6 Report 031621 PB, in the amount of \$1.95. Entertain a
motion to approve warrant report.

7 MR. AUSTIN: Make a motion.

8 MR. CANTU: Second.

9 CHIEF SERNA: All in favor signify by
saying aye?

10 (All signify aye.)

CHIEF SERNA: Motion carries.

11 Next we have approval of Warrant
12 Report 032321 PB, in the amount of \$12,608.01.
Entertain a motion to approve warrant report.

13 MR. CANTU: I move we approve.

14 MR. AUSTIN: Second.

15 CHIEF SERNA: All in favor signify by
saying aye?

16 (All signify aye.)

CHIEF SERNA: Motion carries.

17 Next item on the agenda is Old
18 Business. Madame secretary, any old business?

19 MS. ALLEN: No.

20 CHIEF SERNA: Move on to New Business.
Vanessa Hernandez-Orange, Director of Parks and
21 Recreation.

22 MRS. HERNANDEZ-ORANGE: Good evening,
everyone. Today the first item that we have before you
23 is a donation check from Club Ki-Yowga, once again for
event that we have on Saturday, March 27th, the Easter
24 Egg-Travaganza. We did ask the community partners to
donate to the event to make sure children would be able
to receive baskets and we have had many community
25 partners come through and donate baskets. It's actually

1 very overwhelming to see how many people care about our
2 children.

3 With that being said, partner, Club
4 Ki-Yowga is donating \$100.00 to the event and I would
5 like approval to have this check accepted.

6 CHIEF SERNA: Any questions Board
7 members? (None) Entertain a motion to approve the
8 donation from Club Ki-Yowga, in the amount of \$100, to
9 the Easter baskets.

10 MR. RODRIGUEZ: Make a motion to approve.

11 MR. AUSTIN: Second.

12 CHIEF SERNA: All in favor signify by
13 saying aye?

(All signify aye.)

14 CHIEF SERNA: Motion carries.

15 MRS. HERNANDEZ-ORANGE: Next item that we
16 have before you is past due invoices from Fissinger &
17 Associates. I guess they were going through their
18 invoices and they saw these two items that were still
19 open. We just would like to have approval to pay them.

20 CHIEF SERNA: There is two invoices, one
21 from November 7th, of 2020, and one from January 1st,
22 2021. I imagine -- let's see, that January 1st
23 assignment was December 22nd -- I see. So December 22nd
24 is the January 1st bill and the assignment was
25 October 27th for the November 7th bill. Okay. Any
questions on this Board members? (None) Entertain a
motion to approve.

MR. RODRIGUEZ: Make a motion to approve
the invoices.

MR. AUSTIN: Second.

CHIEF SERNA: Payment to Fissinger &
Associates is \$516.80. All in favor signify by
saying aye?

(All signify aye.)

CHIEF SERNA: Motion carries.

MRS. HERNANDEZ-ORANGE: I just wanted to
give an FYI what is happening in the Park Department.
We'll come before the Board soon. We have been given a

1 little bit of a green speck of light to open up just a
2 little bit more in our department. So after I write
3 everything out to everyone and get the formal approval
4 from Mayor, I'll present it to the Board so you guys
5 know what is happening within our department.

6 I also wanted to say, we did have an
7 incident at Heritage Hall two weeks ago, where two
8 gentlemen basically did not follow our COVID rules, as
9 well as they didn't follow our rules for the centers.
10 So they had about four violations that happened on one
11 day. They also basically intimidated one of my staff
12 members, pushing her against the wall. So with that
13 being said, we sent them letters letting them know that
14 their membership has been revoked without any
15 possibility of being compensated or getting their money
16 back. We take the safety of our staff as very
17 important. And the fact that our staff member and other
18 staff members that were there said that they would have
19 felt intimidated; they saw the whole incident. We made
20 the decision and sent out letters. So I just wanted to
21 give you an update what was happening, just in case
22 anyone came to you guys.

23 CHIEF SERNA: I would highly suggest
24 recommending, if it's in our budget, to have security.
25 Things are what they are, whether it's COVID pandemic or
whether it's a sign of the times; we need to protect our
staff. We need to -- the Park Department isn't the only
entity in East Chicago that has experienced lately some
things like that. The public library has experienced
some things. So I think -- I know you have to check
your budget -- but if we could possibly have security
there, if it's somewhere in the budget.

18 MRS. HERNANDEZ-ORANGE: So we are
19 planning on bringing back security again. If by opening
20 up and possibly doing summer programs, our staff will
21 get taken away, which means that we'll have to not be
22 able to cover, and with COVID. This unfortunately
23 happened during the daytime. We usually wouldn't have
24 anyone come in then, only between 2 and 6 is when they
25 would come, four hours a day. This happened like around
11. It's not usual. Like my staff said they never
really had an issue in the daytime. We do close with
two people every day, so there is always a second staff
member, just because we know there have been issues.
But we also know it does make sense to pay a security
officer to stand there or to be there. But as we open
up, we understand the need and we'll go back to you

1 about paying our security.

2 CHIEF SERNA: All right.

3 MRS. HERNANDEZ-ORANGE: We also have
4 police officers stopping by. I have told patrol,
5 especially at 6:00 o'clock when we close, we do ask them
6 to stop by and check it out.

7 CHIEF SERNA: That's good to have that
8 partnership with the police department.

9 MRS. HERNANDEZ-ORANGE: That's it.

10 CHIEF SERNA: Any questions for our
11 Director, Board members?

12 MR. RODRIGUEZ: Well, is our counsel
13 here?

14 CHIEF SERNA: Miss Dawkins, are you on
15 the line? (No response) No, she's not.

16 MR. RODRIGUEZ: I bring up this question.
17 You don't have any employees anymore, everything is
18 Public Works -- I'm sorry -- - everything is Public
19 Works?

20 MRS. HERNANDEZ-ORANGE: All of our
21 employees are Park Department employees.

22 MR. RODRIGUEZ: All right. The thing is,
23 that it's getting warmer now. People will be having
24 picnics or cookouts, I know they pick up the garbage.

25 MRS. HERNANDEZ-ORANGE: That's Public
Works that cleans up.

MR. RODRIGUEZ: They pick up the cans,
but they don't pick up around the areas. If it's windy,
the trash blows in the yards. The neighbors were
telling me about that.

MRS. HERNANDEZ-ORANGE: Please let me
know as soon as you have -- if there is something that
comes up, call our office, call me, text me, whatever.
So we have been receiving a lot of complaints. I
literally have called the Public Works Department
probably every day. Once we get the information, I give

1 it to them.

2 I had a meeting on Thursday of last
3 week, just kind of discussing with them, what can we do
4 to help, because we understand they're under staffed.
5 And if we have to clean up around our centers or
6 whatever, that's fine, we'll do it until they have
7 staff.

8 I do know that their hours are now
9 starting to go up. They usually do 40 hours during the
10 summer months and that's going to start happening again.
11 So that's coming, and I do know also -- they told me --
12 that the first cut is soon. So a lot of people are
13 complaining how they have flowers, kind of just like
14 dead, that landscape needs some maintenance. So the
15 first cut will be coming May -- well April-ish, May 1.
16 That's when the first cut happens. So we have been
17 trying to hit almost every park to make sure that it's
18 clean.

19 I did a walk through of all the
20 parks and I sent them a list of the graffiti, the rusted
21 benches. I have sent them just items that need
22 maintenance. I asked them to let me know what you
23 cannot do and we'll see what we can do out of our budget
24 to make sure we can upgrade this.

25 So, again, I just ask if you guys
hear or know of anything, please contact us. You guys
are our eyes. We try to go by them as much as possible.

MR. RODRIGUEZ: They complain to me when
the wind is blowing, everything goes towards the houses
and front yards, that's why I brought that up.

The other thing, there are signs
going up, my neighbors and I took some down. One right
across the street, by the tracks over there. They put
them up high and nailed it to the tree, "We buy houses",
we took them down. But you also have, "Adopt A Kid"
signs going up throughout the park. I don't know about
any other parks, but I know in our park there was three
of them, at the Chicago Avenue site, which is the
4800-block site. So they are all going, it looks tacky.
I was working afternoons and I tried to find it on my
Ring to see who's doing it. It didn't reach that far.

MRS. HERNANDEZ-ORANGE: So I have
contacted one of those numbers --

MR. RODRIGUEZ: You did?

MRS. HERNANDEZ-ORANGE: Oh yeah, I did.

1 Because actually I had someone in the area of Washington
2 Park contact me. I did see some in Tod Park. I saw all
3 the signs. I stop if I see them and I pick them up too.
4 I know basically individuals or companies that have
5 stuff put up those signs. I called them and I
6 complained to them that -- if we could find a violation
7 for them putting their stuff on our property -- I said
8 that basically you could kill a year of life for the
9 tree, because they are actually nailing something to the
10 tree. I said -- so this could go further -- and they
11 said, well, it's not my company, blah, blah, blah. So,
12 can I get the number of your boss? Obviously I didn't
13 get one. But we are aware and we are -- I told Public
14 Works the same thing about taking them down.

8
9 MR. RODRIGUEZ: My question was for the
10 counselor, so do we have a City ordinance like that?
11 Can we do anything to fine them or it has to go through
12 the City Council?

11 MRS. HERNANDEZ-ORANGE: I haven't
12 checked. Let me check into that. I know we did have an
13 issue with St. Catherine's because they are actually
14 coming across from St. Catherine's to Washington Park
15 and they are smoking, and all the cigarette butts are
16 around Washington Park. And we were trying to see if
17 there is a code for them dropping their garbage from
18 their employees.

15 MR. RODRIGUEZ: Yeah, it's littering.

16 MRS. HERNANDEZ-ORANGE: Correct. I
17 didn't have to go there. I contacted the president of
18 --

18 CHIEF SERNA: The CEO.

19 MRS. HERNANDEZ-ORANGE: The CEO, and they
20 are very receptive of the situation. They said it
21 wasn't going to happen again. So I made those phone
22 calls to the person who nailed them, maybe they will
23 understand. So I will continue to do that, but I will
24 check to see if there is a City code so we can possibly,
25 maybe find a way to get in contact with that person.

23 MR. RODRIGUEZ: I thought about that too.
24 My neighbor down the street was helping me take them
25 down with a ladder. We pulled them off and looked tacky
as hell.

1 And then the mulch, I know last year
2 we asked if you could use red mulch instead of brown.
3 We were told the red mulch would kill the tree. The
4 brown mulch is the same thing, the same process. It
5 does not kill the trees and it looks better. Especially
6 the seniors like it that way, brings it out from the
7 green and the red.

8 MRS. HERNANDEZ-ORANGE: So with that in
9 mind, we had a meeting with the tree conservator, his
10 name is Mr. Hearse I think it is, which we are getting
11 close to Arbor Day, which will be April 30th this year,
12 and the trees at Roxana Park. That's coming forward.
13 We did ask him -- Public Works asked the difference
14 between red and brown. And he stated, and this is what
15 he does being a tree conservator, he stated it's best to
16 use the brown because it's natural. The red is not
17 natural, it has dye. So if we are growing the trees,
18 then that could harm the tree from growing. So that's
19 why, that's the reason.

20 MR. RODRIGUEZ: The natural, they dye
21 that too. They dye it brown so it all looks uniform,
22 natural color, brown shades. The lady down the street
23 looked into it and that's what she said.

24 MRS. HERNANDEZ-ORANGE: Depending on what
25 tree, what location it is at, if they are the ones
26 putting the tree down and they are going to be doing a
27 lot of the trees, that purchase all on them. We don't
28 purchase that. Now, the other mulch, I mean it would be
29 hard to separate the red. I think they just do one bulk
30 order and doesn't come from us, it comes from Public
31 Works.

32 Again, I could ask, but if they do a
33 bulk order, I can't really say, because I actually asked
34 them this year. I needed all the playgrounds to be
35 filled because it's a liability when we don't have a
36 playground with any mulch or anything that could stop a
37 fall. So I asked them to put that there also.

38 So, again, I could ask again if we
39 could get more red, or if there is a difference in
40 pricing.

41 MR. RODRIGUEZ: I understand they buy in
42 bulk, but they could buy red in bulk. It just looks
43 better to me. The other looks like dirt, plan dirt.

44 Like I said, my neighbors -- who
45 have been there for years and we all know each other, so

1 we all talk to each other all the time -- when they were
2 putting the signs up, I was working that afternoon they
3 are doing it. They didn't want to approach the guy
4 doing it, but there were no letters on the truck.

3

4 MRS. HERNANDEZ-ORANGE: Please let me
5 know. I will, as soon as I find out, we will continue
6 to --

5

6 MR. RODRIGUEZ: I will let you know.

6

7 MRS. HERNANDEZ-ORANGE: And also have
8 Public Works make sure to have that taken down,
9 basically have people come take those out for us because
10 they are hitting almost every park.

9

10 MR. RODRIGUEZ: I don't know. I did know
11 Riley Park. There's one on the telephone pole across
12 the street on the other side of the tracks, going south
13 of the tracks, there's another sign there. I saw it on
14 my way here tonight. I haven't looked at the other
15 parks. I don't know if they hit those too or not. As I
16 said it looks tacky and if we have a City ordinance to
17 fine them if they put it up.

13

14 MRS. HERNANDEZ-ORANGE: I will look into
15 it.

15

16 MR. RODRIGUEZ: Do we pass it first or
17 does it have to come to the City Council?

16

17 MRS. HERNANDEZ-ORANGE: I will look into
18 that and give you more information.

18

19 MRS. DAWKINS: I'm here. I was a little
20 late.

19

20 CHIEF SERNA: Attorney Dawkins, are you
21 with us?

21

22 MRS. DAWKINS: Yes, I'm here.

22

23 MR. RODRIGUEZ: Counsel, I want to know
24 if there is a City ordinance or do we pass one to fine
25 companies that put signs on our trees in our parks?
They are actually nailing them to the trees, about
buying homes or adopt a child.

24

25 MRS. DAWKINS: There is a new ordinance

1 that we just started using and it has to do with damages
2 to City property. I need to look at it again to see if
3 that would include it. I don't see -- I would think
4 that the trees are City property, and if there is damage
5 to the property, then we could.

6 MR. RODRIGUEZ: Well, I don't know about
7 damage, but we could consider that damage when they nail
8 it to the tree, but just putting their signs on the
9 trees.

10 MRS. DAWKINS: I have to look and see if
11 there is an ordinance just to fine them for doing it. I
12 don't know about that. But I know we have a new
13 nuisance ordinance that I was using in another area, so
14 I can revisit that and see if it would apply, and I can
15 let you know.

16 MR. RODRIGUEZ: Okay, thank you.

17 MRS. DAWKINS: You are saying people are
18 putting signs up -- I did come in late, I apologize for
19 that -- and I didn't hear all of the discussion, other
20 than just your question.

21 MR. RODRIGUEZ: Yeah, putting signs in
22 the parks. I don't know about other parks, but Vanessa
23 said are they putting them in Washington Park. They are
24 putting signs in the parks and it kind of looks tacky.
25 I took down four signs last week with neighbors. I just
want to know if we call and fine them. There is no
addresses on them, that's the point.

MRS. DAWKINS: Then service would be a
problem then. I can try to figure out where they came
from or whatever.

MR. RODRIGUEZ: There is phone numbers on
them, but no addresses.

MRS. HERNANDEZ-ORANGE: Miss Dawkins, if
you'd like, tomorrow we can discuss this in detail
because I called the number. They didn't give me any
information on the person who owns the company, but just
we can discuss it in further detail.

MRS. DAWKINS: Okay. Do we actually have
-- I need to look and see what exactly would cover that.
If they don't know that they can't post signs, that

1 would be one thing. They should have called to ask
first if they could post the sign.

2

MR. RODRIGUEZ: Can we send them a
3 warning letter?

4 MRS. DAWKINS: We could send them a
warning letter for sure, there's no problem.

5

CHIEF SERNA: I guess the question is,
6 research and see if there is any ordinance about putting
these signs on trees that belong to the City parks.

7

And then the second thing would be,
8 if there is not, maybe we could look into that. I think
that's where we'll leave it. Vanessa, can you follow-up
with Attorney Dawkins tomorrow?

9

MRS. HERNANDEZ-ORANGE: Certainly.

10

CHIEF SERNA: Vanessa, anything else for
11 us?

12

MRS. HERNANDEZ-ORANGE: No, that's all
for me.

13

CHIEF SERNA: Any questions for the
14 Director?

15

MR. AUSTIN: I have one question. I'd
like to know, what are we going to do for the summer? I
16 mean have we got any plans, since we got this COVID-19,
are we going to just cancel out everything. What
17 activities may be over the summer? When they let all
the schools out, do we have any plans for the kids?
18 Maybe at least try to be ahead of that.

19

MRS. HERNANDEZ-ORANGE: Yes, we do have
plans for the summer to have a different version of
20 summer camp. Everything will be outdoors for the
children. It's not -- well, that's finalized. So we
21 are going to have about eight weeks worth of camp,
basically sports camps.

22

I am also working with the Special
Education Director, I would like to do a Quiet Camp, so
23 our special needs children could actually partake in
something where they are able to touch and feel, because
24 we miss our special needs community. So I am going to
work on that with her. We need the funding for it, so I
25 started the talks.

1 The coaches from the high school
2 would be the ones that will be actually doing the camp,
3 so teaching the camp. So that we can make a connection
4 from the Parks and Recreation Department and the School
5 City.

6 When I used to work here, back in my
7 younger days, in 2001 and 2002, that's how we used to do
8 things. And that's how you would meet who the coaches
9 were and so forth. And then you have that feeder system
10 grow, because I understand the importance of -- you
11 know -- keeping our kids in our City, as well as family
12 in our City -- I want to continue that. You get more
13 coaches for the amount we pay. Hey, we are going to
14 donate this to your team. Then they are going to say,
15 okay. Then you have three coaches rather than just
16 bringing one. That's how that's different.

17 I was kind of waiting to see where
18 funding was really coming from to release it, but it
19 looks like we are going to be able to have a good
20 summer. So there will be no swimming pool this year, no
21 swimming outdoors. That's a definite no to that.

22 But, again, the next meeting I'll
23 give you more information in regards to the summer
24 because I know events are going to be allowed, also a
25 little bit of some events. So we are excited.

MR. AUSTIN: The reason why I brought it
up, because some of the kids -- you know -- they
question me about it. So -- you know -- I would like to
have some kind of information. I don't know -- like I
told them -- I don't know how they are going to react
for this year because the pool, I don't know if that's
going to be shut down for the whole year or what. You
know what I'm saying?

CHIEF SERNA: I think the best thing is
probably a phone call, phone call to Vanessa during
business hours and she can print something up, because
that would be good too. If he's talking to kids in the
community, we could pass out a flier with an
advertisement. That's a great way to do that. Talk
with Vanessa after the meeting or during business hours,
and give him that information. That's great to have
someone in the community to do that.

MR. AUSTIN: Because why I was saying
this, I like to have -- maybe at the next meeting,
before students get out -- try to be ahead of what is in
the future of what we're going to have. Maybe pass out

some fliers, you know. Then when they ask me, I can

1 give it to them.

2 CHIEF SERNA: That would be the plan.
3 The more information the better. All right, Vanessa,
4 Thank you.

Any public comments?

4 MRS. DAWKINS: I have a public comment.
5 I love my Zoom exercise class for seniors, that's the
6 senior chair exercises.

6 CHIEF: Well, all right.

7 MRS. HERNANDEZ-ORANGE: Thank you.

8 MRS. DAWKINS: It's great. And my sister
9 took -- my older sister likes to paint. She said it was
10 wonderful. So I just wanted to let our director know
11 she is doing a fine job.

11 CHIEF SERNA: All right. Thank you very
12 much. Thank you very much, Counselor.

12 Our next meeting date is Tuesday,
13 April 13th, right here at City Hall Council Chambers, at
14 5:00 p.m.. I'd entertain a motion to adjourn.

14 MR. RODRIGUEZ: Make a motion to adjourn.

15 MR. AUSTIN: Second.

16 CHIEF SERNA: All in favor signify by
17 saying aye?

(All signify aye.)

18 CHIEF SERNA: Motion carries. Meeting
19 adjourned.

19 ***** Meeting Adjourned *****

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Approval of the Meeting Minutes of Tuesday
March 23, 2021

Approved and signed April 13, 2021


Anthony Serna, President


Rick Rodriguez, Vice-President

Valda Lewis, Secretary

Gilberto Cantu, Member


Eugene Austin, Member


Ateria Allen, Recording Secretary

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C E R T I F I C A T E

I, Peggy S. LaLonde, a competent and duly qualified court reporter, do hereby certify that I did report in machine shorthand the foregoing proceedings and that my shorthand notes so taken at said time and place were thereafter reduced to typewriting under my personal direction.

I further certify that the foregoing typewritten transcript constitutes minutes of the said proceedings taken at said time and place, so ordered to be transcribed.

Dated at Munster, Indiana, this 26th day of March, 2021.

Peggy S. LaLonde

Peggy S. LaLonde, CSR, RPR

