

CITY OF EAST CHICAGO
BOARD OF PARKS AND RECREATION
October 26, 2021

BOARD MEMBERS:

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

STAFF:

Ateria Allen
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: Anthony Serna, Eugene Austin
Rick Rodriguez

Telephonic: Valda Lewis, Gilberto Cantu

Staff Present: Ateria Allen
Vanessa Hernandez-Orange

MR. SERNA: We do have a quorum.

First, under Administrative Matters,
we have approval of October 12, 2021 meeting minutes, as
written. I'll entertain a motion to approve.

MR. CANTU: I move for approval.

MR. AUSTIN: Second.

MR. SERNA: All in favor signify by
saying aye?

(All signify aye.)

Motion carries.

Next item on the agenda is approval
of payroll dated, October 15, 2021. Entertain a motion
to approve payroll of October 15, 2021.

MS. LEWIS: Move for approval of payroll.

MR. CANTU: Second.

MR. SERNA: All in favor signify by
saying aye?

1 (All signify aye.)
Motion carries.

2 Next we have approval of Warrant
Report 102621 PB, in the amount of \$9,639.16. Entertain
3 a motion to approve warrant report.

4 MR. RODRIGUEZ: Make a motion to approve
warrant report.

5 MR. AUSTIN: Second.

6 MR. SERNA: All in favor signify by
7 saying aye?

8 (All signify aye.)
Motion carries.

9 Next item is Old Business. Do we
have any old business, Madame Secretary?

10 MS. ALLEN: No old business.

11 MR. SERNA: Move on to the next item on
the agenda, which is New Business, Vanessa
12 Hernandez-Orange. Welcome back.

13 MRS. HERNANDEZ-ORANGE: Thank you. It
feels good to be back and able to update you guys on
14 some things. I know Genesis did a great job presenting,
but she didn't feel confident in answering questions.
15 So here's a couple of things I want to update the Board
on.

16 First and foremost, Riley Park, they
broke ground there and we expect to see the rest of the
17 structures put in place by no later than next week.
Everything is actually put together at the Washington
18 Park garage, so it's basically good to go.

19 We'll start breaking ground on the
Markstown, kind of project for benches. So we noticed
that two of the parks don't have any benches around the
20 playground area, so we decided to add a couple benches
in that area. That will start very shortly.

21 We also have ACIA system training on
this week. So we ended up getting rid of the older fish
22 and get approved to bring in new fingerlings, and with
the bringing of new fingerlings we had to reset
23 everything. With the reset, we noticed a couple of
items we were not doing correctly. So with that being
24 said, we ended up asking for training, and with the
training we have learned to, I guess, prolong the life
25 of the system. They did change out our water tank

1 because they wanted for us to increase nutrients and
2 help with the new water tank, and it will push items
3 through quicker. So we have been doing training. We
4 hope to see the fingerlings in within the next six weeks
5 from the week I came back, so probably three more weeks
6 left till we get the fingerlings, doesn't mean we
7 stopped getting curbside. Our partners of the NBI food
8 bank, as well as Catholic Charities will continue to
9 give residents of East Chicago food. So that's all
10 still going on.

11 And the other items I have to update
12 you on today, we received from Parks some playground
13 equipment that's messed up. So I did walk through with
14 New Toys. We found items that needed to be replaced and
15 fixed. We finally received all that, as well as for the
16 fitness equipment. Tod Park had one of the rowers that
17 didn't work, so they finally brought them. We hope to
18 install them soon, obviously before it gets too cold.

19 And finally, Block Stadium, the
20 construction of Block Stadium is now done. We were
21 going to have a small ribbon cutting ceremony. Ateria
22 has given you guys the invitation. Again this is
23 something very small. The reason why we are doing it
24 small is because we just want to commemorate the
25 building is complete. The next phase we have to do is
26 furnish it. The batting cages that are there, we have
27 to add the pitching machine, little things that we have
28 to continue to add. The plan is for the springtime to
29 do something huge to celebrate this project that has
30 been put so much into.

31 So we are also going to entertain
32 people who would like to come and be part of Block
33 Stadium. I was on a call with ISHA on the interim
34 playgrounds. ISHA wants to use Block Stadium. The last
35 game here was in '98 if I'm not mistaken. You might
36 know --

37 MR. SERNA: The last tournament, ISHA
38 tournament?

39 MRS. HERNANDEZ-ORANGE: We only had one
40 game in '98 and had it there. So we are excited to
41 invite the partnership like that. Minor leagues come
42 and want to talk to us. So we'll be out talking to
43 people to see who's going to be playing at Block
44 Stadium.

45 Again, this is a soft opening. In
46 the Spring we'll do something big to celebrate.

I wanted to give you guys a couple

1 of update items on events. So we are moving forward
2 with events in the City. As you guys might have heard,
3 the first event we have is going to be on October 29th,
4 this Friday, it's Trunk or Treat. It was a great
5 success last year. We had over 500 kids there that got
candy. We got them all sugared up and we were excited
you guys took them home afterwards, but we have about 32
cars going to partake. October 29th, from 5 to 7, and
that will be at McShane.

6 Like I said earlier, we have the
7 Block Stadium ribbon cutting on October 30th, and that's
8 at 2:00 p.m. After -- we have a few speakers -- we'll
do a quick tour. Mr. Austin, I think you wanted to get
a tour on Saturday, and then we'll have refreshments for
the crowd that's there.

9 Then, if you are attending the Trunk
10 or Treat, inside the bag for the children, they are
11 going to get a program flier and we are going to have
12 the holiday season programming at the Parks and
13 Recreation Department. What we are going to do is, we
14 are going to have classes for adults, and then we are
15 going to have classes for children to do holiday season
16 decor. We see all over the place about making wreaths,
17 those big welcome signs for the door; so we are going to
18 have four weeks of some type of decor that you can give
19 away to family members or you can keep it in your house
20 as the holiday season comes and we like to spruce up our
21 home.

22 This is just a way of bringing
23 programs back into our facilities. They had the
24 basketball program a couple weeks ago. I was out, but
25 that was a great event. Everyone was safe and we were
spread out. So we are introducing things in small ways.

26 And finally, just get you guys ready
27 for the holidays, we are starting to work on the
28 Celebration of Lights here at City Hall. Most important
29 is the Holiday Give Away given by the Parks and
30 Recreation Department, that will be on the 4th, and it's
31 going to be from 4 to 6:00 p.m., at the Washington Park
32 office. So we are going to have like curbside. We'll
33 have it there. We have all the lights there, so we are
34 excited to bring it to our office. We are going to use
35 the Greenhouse to kind of store gifts that day, but it
is just we do a great job of curbside and we want to
show off more stuff of Washington Park.

36 I think that's all I have. If you
37 have any questions, I know I have been out -- thank you
38 for being patient -- please let me know.

25

1 MR. SERNA: Any questions? We'll go on
2 the phone first. Mr. Cantu or Miss Lewis, any questions
3 for the Director?

4 MS. LEWIS: What did you say was
5 happening October 30th?

6 MRS. HERNANDEZ-ORANGE: It will be the
7 ribbon cutting of Block Stadium, soft opening to
8 commemorate the completion of the construction of Block
9 Stadium.

10 MS. LEWIS: What time?

11 MRS. HERNANDEZ-ORANGE: That will be at
12 2:00 p.m. and Ateria said she is going to e-mail
13 everyone the invite tomorrow.

14 MR. SERNA: Thank you, Miss Lewis. Any
15 questions? Rick, any questions?

16 MR. RODRIGUEZ: Just two questions. I
17 know I was gone for two weeks, I was on vacation, the
18 Parks security, are they going to have it during the
19 wintertime?

20 MRS. HERNANDEZ-ORANGE: No. Actually
21 Park security ended last week. The park bathrooms are
22 now closed. The security was actually a great help.
23 They not only did rounds to make sure everyone complied
24 with the park rules, but they also checked to make sure
25 if something was broken, they let us know and we were
able to let Public Works know. Honestly this was a huge
help for us. It was a short time, but it was a huge
help and we'll continue that next year.

MR. RODRIGUEZ: Anybody told you anything
about -- I talked to one of the security officers about
why she was driving on the track. And I told her, I
said, are you getting permission to drive on the track?
And she said, well, when we get a call. I asked, did
you get a call today? I said, if you are on the track
and there is kids or people on the track, who moves? Do
you move or they move? And she didn't know what to say.
So I told her, I said, you know, I'm glad you guys are
out here, but I'm not sure you should be riding on the
track. So that's the only thing I have about that,
that's the only issue. There are kids out there and --
at that time there was nobody -- but if there was

1 somebody, who moves; so that's all I said. I think you
2 can visually check if there is anyone on the track
instead of actually driving on the track.

3 MRS. HERNANDEZ-ORANGE: I'm going to be
4 honest, I did give them permission to go on the track.
5 The garbage truck goes on the track as they go around.
6 That track is able to hold, I think -- I forgot how many
7 tons I was told -- so it's able to hold the cars. So at
8 the end of the day, pedestrians -- people -- are
9 obviously the most important. I will definitely make
sure to reiterate to Federal Protection that fact. I
10 think they said we are here because of people using our
11 facility and amenities, but 100 percent they need to be
12 mindful of anyone in the park. Thank you for bringing
13 that up and I will talk to Federal Protection.

14 MR. RODRIGUEZ: One more, the ribbon
15 cutting, are there any professionals coming?

16 MRS. HERNANDEZ-ORANGE: I actually was
17 reaching out to Kenny Lofton, but because it was so last
18 minute, again because I didn't have those dates when
19 everything was suppose to be finished, and then they
20 finally gave us the okay, we are done; we wanted to put
21 something together. We reached out to Kenny Lofton and
22 he actually has a prior engagement. I spoke to Tim
23 Sauder, I finally had a conversation with him. He had a
24 knee replacement and he's not able to come to this one.
25 He's a coach for a college, but he said --

MR. RODRIGUEZ: Northwestern.

MRS. HERNANDEZ-ORANGE: He's not there
anymore. He's at -- it's a D-3 school. But he said he
will try to make it in the Spring, as long as we give
him advance notice. And we have put banners up at Block
Stadium, so we plan on reaching out to all those for the
Spring because we weren't able to. And we have someone
from our Special Events team that's trying to reach out
to the Block family, because we would like for them to
come also. We have Block Stadium because of them, so we
want to commemorate them also. We did find out of their
organization to try to reach out to them. We've been
sending letters to start communication for the Spring.

MR. SERNA: Anything else?

MR. RODRIGUEZ: Thank you for the

1 exercise equipment, people are really happy about it.
2 Build something, they will come and use it, and
3 especially the trail and tracks. You got out the senior
4 citizens to use it during the morning. They are out in
5 the morning, really early in the morning, walking that
6 track.

7 MRS. HERNANDEZ-ORANGE: That's not me,
8 the Mayor is the one that said, yes, do this and we plan
9 on doing more. So that's not the last one that's going
10 to happen.

11 MR. RODRIGUEZ: Anything upfront, you are
12 going to be doing upfront of the Rec Center, that whole
13 area? I know the Hall of Fame thing you were talking
14 about.

15 MRS. HERNANDEZ-ORANGE: The two towers.

16 MR. RODRIGUEZ: Are you going to do that?

17 MRS. HERNANDEZ-ORANGE: At Riley Park, in
18 front of the hut. So the two towers are going to be
19 set. We had a plan of what we wanted it to be and then
20 we basically scratched that plan. We want to dedicate
21 one of the towers to the Mayor. He said, no, that's not
22 how I role. I don't want you guys to give me the cudos
23 to this. So because he said no to that, we are trying
24 to see what else we want to put in place of that. We
25 came up with doing some quotes. The company showed us
the lighting that we could put on to make it look nice.
So we're working on it.

MR. SERNA: Anything else? Mr. Austin,
anything?

MR. AUSTIN: Everything sounds real nice,
but I would like to know what kind of protection that
you are going to have because you are going to have to
have some kind of people to oversee what you saying is
going to happen, because the kids -- now I deal with the
kids practically every day. They are out of control and
they live across from each other. They are living in
the same building. When they hit the streets going to
school, you know, you need some police protection
because the crossing guards, we are not police and then
just to make sure. We have a nice program you are
putting together, but you are going to have some kind of
rules that you are going to have to have because

1 otherwise you are going to have a lot of chaos.

2 MRS. HERNANDEZ-ORANGE: The good thing,
3 first and foremost, at the centers, the Rec centers, we
4 have the security that's there. Federal Protection is
5 there, as well as we try to staff there. The goal or
6 the plan -- and when you guys talk to the Council
7 people, please let them know I have a staff of 30 and we
8 need to keep a staff of 30 because as we open up, we
9 need to make sure that we overlap people. So if I have
10 a program going on in the gym, then a program going on
11 in the gym, program going on in the classroom; the
12 program in the classroom, opening and closing. So we
13 make sure that we are staffed adequately to keep
14 everyone, all staff, safe. I will definitely not allow
15 staff not to be safe, that won't happen. Mayor will not
16 allow that to happen. Right now that's the issue. We
17 are trying to find a way to staff everyone to remain
18 open as much as we can. We just don't have it to open
19 up yet.

11 MR. AUSTIN: The only thing I am looking
12 at, you are going to have to figure out some kind of way
13 that people can utilize this park. They can't be saying
14 this is ours and this is yours. I think we are going to
15 be right on top of that.

14 MRS. HERNANDEZ-ORANGE: I totally agree,
15 and I think like the Mayor said to us the other day, as
16 a special events team, Block Stadium is going to be used
17 to unify the community. We want them to come here from
18 all parts of town to watch a ball game, to eat popcorn,
19 to take part in something. It's not one side of town
20 against the other side of town. It's East Chicago. We
21 want East Chicago to invite other cities to the area, to
22 come see Block Stadium. This is one push to make sure
23 we continue to unify in the City of East Chicago.
24 Hopefully it will happen.

20 MR. SERNA: Anything else, Mr. Austin?

21 MR. AUSTIN: I think for the time being
22 this is something that we are going to look over at
23 every meeting. We are going to have to be doing it.
24 Once you have a lapse, then you are out of control, then
25 you going to have a lot of trouble. If you try to keep
it at a minimum, then you don't let it get spread out.

25 MRS. HERNANDEZ-ORANGE: I understand.

1 MR. AUSTIN: Again, I'm seeing these
kids, and these kids are bad.

2 MR. SERNA: All right. Any further
3 questions for Vanessa?

4 MR. AUSTIN: Like I say, what I am
5 talking about, this is all coordinated to us because
they are going to have to deal with it.

6 MR. SERNA: Okay. All right, do you have
7 anything further, Vanessa?

8 MRS. HERNANDEZ-ORANGE: That's all.

9 MR. SERNA: Thank you very much, and
welcome back.

10 Next item on the agenda is Public
Comment? Do we have any public comment? (None)

11 Next meeting date is Tuesday,
November 9, 2021, right here at City Hall Council
Chambers, at 5:00 p.m.

12 Entertain a motion to adjourn.

13 MR. RODRIGUEZ: Make a motion to adjourn.

14 MR. AUSTIN: Second.

15 MR. SERNA: All in favor of the motion?
(All signify aye.)


16 Motion carries. Meeting adjourned.

17 ***** Meeting Adjourned *****
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Approval of the Meeting Minutes of Tuesday
October 26, 2021

Approved and signed November 9, 2021


Anthony Serna, President

Rick Rodriguez, Vice-President

Valda Lewis / Zoom
Valda Lewis, Secretary

Gilberto Cantu / Zoom
Gilberto Cantu, Member


Eugene Austin, Member


Ateria Allen, Recording Secretary

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 1st day of November, 2021.

Peggy S. LaLonde

Peggy S. LaLonde, CSR, RPR

