



**Escondido Creek Parkway
Oversight Committee Meeting**
Kenedy City Hall
November 18, 2020

MINUTES

Attendees:

Collen Brownlow, San Antonio River Authority
Dee Hallmark, Kenedy Chamber of Commerce
Kristen Hansen, San Antonio River Authority
Meera Keshav, San Antonio River Authority
William Linn, City of Kenedy
Justin Meyer, 4B Corporation

Gary Richards, 4B Corporation
Gaylon Oehlke, San Antonio River Authority
Kathy Oehlke, Fundraising Committee
Leslie Wynn, Kenedy City Council
Greg Zaragoza, Interlex

The meeting was called to order at 6:10 p.m. by Gaylon Oehlke.

I. Approval of Minutes

Gaylon Oehlke motioned to approve the August meeting minutes, which was seconded by the committee and then approved unanimously.

II. Grand Opening Recap

Meera shared a recap of the park grand opening event in October, which was mostly held virtually on social media due to the ongoing COVID pandemic. A small ribbon cutting ceremony was filmed in-person, while a video featuring testimonials from the community was widely shared. The opening received considerable coverage locally and in other areas like San Antonio as well. Overall, online engagement throughout the opening weekend was high. Sizeable crowds were already visiting and enjoying the park, and parking lots were reported to fill quickly. Gaylon recognized that a few visitors had trouble finding the grand opening videos at first, and Meera replied that all of the videos can be found on both SARA's YouTube channel and Facebook page. Content to promote ECP was also provided to County-wide media outlets.

III. Construction Update

Collen mentioned that amenities like additional picnic tables, benches, and trash cans will be installed over time as necessary. Most of the interpretive park signs were manufactured, yet still needed to be mounted into their frames at the correct locations. A quote had also been requested for magnetic restroom locks. SARA and Jerdon conducted a thorough punch list inspection of the park on November 11 to review any further issues to be fixed.

As Collen shared images of the playground and horned toad sculpture, Kathy noted that certain areas of the newly installed ground rubber coating were already discolored, and that some of the benches nearby were light enough to lift and move and may easily be damaged or stolen by visitors. Collen stated that those and other wear-and-tear issues, like small chips in the playground equipment, will be closely monitored, as most items are under warranty and can be replaced. Kristen suggested contacting the manufacturers of the playground equipment and benches for better, more secure treatment and installation.



Collen then detailed the pavilion, and Kathy stated that she saw that the cisterns had been connected to gutters to properly collect rainfall. A BBQ pit was installed, and Gaylon wondered whether smaller pits could be installed later near other clusters of benches throughout the park.

More benches were scheduled to be added around the splashpad by the end of November, partially to more effectively prevent kids from running through the area or even onto the nearby street unsupervised, or for cyclists or skateboarders to cut through. The bucket at the splashpad has been properly calibrated and winterized, and Vortex provided training sessions for its operation again in the spring.

Kathy asked about plans for the butterfly garden. Kristen mentioned that the ground will have to be treated with herbicide before laying a base for the garden in the spring. A variety of pollinator-friendly plants will form the garden in addition to Muhly grass as used in the LID feature. Any vegetation damaged while park construction or maintenance continues will be paid for by Jerdon. Dee also said that she noticed some donated trees which appeared to be dead; Kristen noted that an arborist examined the trees and confirmed that they are only in shock due to the colder weather and coming winter season.

Kathy told the committee that visitors had been tampering with or ignoring altogether the temporary fencing meant to keep people away from areas still under construction. After Gaylon noted that installing gates at the park entrances was part of the original project plan, Kristen said that SARA met with both Kenedy City Council and the police department. While strong security presence at the park is assured, the police department preferred not to erect gates at ECP entrances, for fears that such barriers would restrict vehicle access if on pursuit at night, potentially.

Gary stated that the City was asked to consider amplified trail lighting for later hours. Kristen and Collen highlighted the need to coordinate lighting throughout the park, as some lights such as those at the pavilion are on at night while others such as those over the parking lots are not. Kathy also asked if signage with park hours and rules would be posted at the entrances. Gaylon and Kristen acknowledged the fact that there will always be additions to the park amenities, or even changes in park rules in alignment with City ordinances, as more people continue to visit.

Q: Will additional trash cans be placed at the playground, splashpad, and/or pavilion?

A: Yes, there is a quote for additional trash cans. The punch list inspection revealed a need to finish installation as well.

IV. Phase II

Kristen and Gaylon commented on how nearly all of the existing park construction was completed as originally planned; focus on retention ponds and creek restoration had been moved into the second phase of the project because of permitting delays. Within the past year, SARA had earmarked around \$50K for these purposes, but with approval from the SARA executive team and board, those funds were reallocated toward the new Joe Gulley connector trail (in addition to funding from the City and County). Kristen asked the committee their thoughts on what a re-envisioned Phase II would look like.

Dee, Kristen, and Gaylon discussed the possibilities of extending trails to connect to local schools (or even past 5th St. to downtown Kenedy), considering there is already noticeable interest throughout the community. While adding a retention pond was once more of a priority, TxDOT would not grant approval for construction under Hwy. 181 or on its adjacent property. The committee discussed the areas



surrounding the parkway and whether landowners would be willing to donate or sell acres for further trail expansion, or whether land could be acquired via eminent domain as a later resort. Once planning for the next fiscal year is underway, SARA, with assistance from their real estate department, could hold a public meeting regarding trail extension to the schools as a top priority with support from the City, or possibly elsewhere like 4B. Justin suggested approaching the SARA real estate department about splitting Phase II into sub-phases, the first focused on extending trails to the schools while a later phase might focus on extension closer to downtown. The committee could review any approximate appraisal values of the land, while taking trail square footage into account, and begin approaching community organizations about contributing funds. The committee also recognized that the project overall already provides good estimates of the costs of certain features, such as low-water crossings, needed to build further along Escondido Creek.

V. Fundraising/Donation Update

New general donations since the previous committee meeting totaled \$1,785. Kathy shared that the tour video helped generate interest in covering costs for outstanding park items, and she hoped that more people would be willing to donate as the project continues to receive media coverage. Kathy also said that she received a call from an individual (from ConocoPhillips, she later revealed) who wanted to contribute \$15K to the project in return for a stone plaque on the donor wall, and the committee discussed where the money could be allocated. The committee discussed placing the donation toward purchasing more trash cans, in hopes of aligning with the company's initiatives for an increased contribution.

Kathy continues to receive calls about donating money to the project; she and Kristen decided that perhaps BBQ pits were the smallest items to purchase, but only incrementally after determining where to place them in the park as they are hard to maintain and easily damaged and vandalized. Leslie and Gary suggested increasing the donation prices and looking at more durable BBQ pits.

The committee recognized a need to convert the highly popular designer bag bingo fundraiser to a virtual format amid the ongoing COVID pandemic, yet they explored any way to still hold the event in person, such as setting up tables out at the baseball fields, identifying larger venues or halls with enough capacity and distancing space, or even closing part of downtown Kenedy for an outdoor event. Regardless of where the event happens, Kristen and Leslie recalled that the mayor would maybe grant permission to hold an event of only up to 50 individuals, and the fundraiser draws much bigger crowds. Justin wondered whether people would be as interested in participating if the event were held in-person and a higher number of tickets were sold as usual; attendees might be intrigued by higher chances of winning a bag if a limited quantity of tickets were released instead. Gaylon commented that the main source of fundraising revenue always came from tickets and tables sold; Leslie remarked on the social nature of the event that brings people together every year. Justin and Dee noted that other events in the community successfully transitioned to virtual formats over Facebook Live. Kristen and Kathy highlighted the strong public support of the project, and agreed that people would remain interested in a bingo fundraiser in any format.

VI. Social Media Update

Meera reviewed social media metrics over the week following the ECP grand opening event; the community testimonial and park tour videos were particularly popular. She showed the committee where to find the videos on YouTube and Facebook before playing both videos for everyone. Kristen, Meera, and Kathy noted the reservations for the amphitheater via the ECP website and direct calls to SARA. Gaylon reminded Kristen and Meera to see that the correct address for the park is listed online and elsewhere.



Kristen and Meera lastly shared an online version of the donor wall, featuring names of donors and descriptions of their contributed items with GPS coordinates and locations viewable on the ECP park map. Kathy added that the online donor wall is a great resource for individuals who do not have the ability to visit in person.

VII. Other

William Linn, Kenedy City Manager, provided an update on the repaving at Pullen St.; between potential delays due to the Thanksgiving holiday and other projects on the contractor's schedule, William estimated that construction would be complete in about four weeks, adding extra time in case weather delayed the project further. He added that more lighting and cameras, as well as solar-powered call boxes with direct contact to City officers, would be installed at the pavilion and along sidewalks throughout the park to enhance safety and security.

Kristen mentioned the construction of the connector trails to Joe Gulley Park; Kathy noted that visitors were wondering if these trails would open. After determining the property line between the two parks, the new trails would add 2.5 miles of contiguous walking paths. Kathy and Gaylon raised concerns that additional fencing would be needed along CR 367 to both prevent visitors from parking in illegal spots and to keep pedestrians safe from traffic. William maintained that strategically placed barriers could help deter unwanted traffic, but that fences are not a priority for the City; he felt that more fencing would restrict public access to property funded by taxpayers. The committee later revisited this issue, deciding that removable bollards could prevent vehicle access while still allowing pedestrians and cyclists to enjoy any proposed trails in the future. Minimal cable fencing could be placed along the trail near Pullen St. as well.

Q: How wide are the trails?

A: As wide as possible, enough for two people to walk comfortably side-by-side. Using red granite as initially planned does not mean the trails need to be ADA-compliant.

Meeting adjourned at 8:36 PM.

Next meeting will be Wednesday, February 10, 2021.