

RECREATION AND PARKS ADVISORY BOARD MEETING  
February 22<sup>nd</sup>, 2023 – 7:00 p.m.  
Approved Minutes

**Members Present:** Kristin Darby, Donald Gerkin (Chair), David Ferguson (Vice-Chair), Anthony Rosas, Austin Johnstone, Anita Taylor, Brad Rockwood, Megan Vaughn

**Members Excused:** Michael Duffy

**Staff Present:** Lisa Carroll, Brad Rogers, Dawn Harry, Ashley Caltrider

**Ex-Officio Member Present:** Jeff Degitz

**Community Members Present:** Rebecca Friedman, Gina Branham, Steve Bishop, Rick Singer, Carolyn Garber, Ken Harris, Allison Malachowski, Brian Toeneboehn, Marjorie Williamson, Michael Davis, Debra Robertson, Rita Jacobs, Nelson Bull, Jon Arnold

The Recreation and Parks Advisory Board met on February 22<sup>nd</sup> at the County Office Building, room 003/004. The meeting was called to order at 7:00p.m. by Mr. Gerkin, Board Chair.

**WELCOME AND INTRODUCTIONS:**

Jeff Degitz introduced himself and Ashley Caltrider, new Administrative Assistant and recording secretary for the Advisory Board. Board members and staff introduced themselves.

**APPROVAL OF MINUTES:**

Mr. Rockwood moved to approve the October 26<sup>th</sup>, 2022, meeting minutes; Ms. Darby seconded, all concurred and minutes were approved.

**DIRECTOR'S REPORT:**

Provided by Mr. Degitz.

1. **Staff Updates** – Rebecca Eckard has been promoted into the Program Specialist position. Holly Zimmerman started as the new Office Associate on 12/22/22. Ashley Caltrider started as new Administrative Assistant on 2/2. Ashley replaces Laura Tawes and will be involved with Program Open Space and Park Legacy Fund and serve as first point of contact for Advisory Board members.
2. **Meetings with New Commissioners** – A department overview was shared with County Commissioners on 2/2 and individual meetings held with each new Commissioner regarding issues in their districts. In addition, Brad Rogers and I took Commissioner Vigliotti on a tour of the new NW Regional Park site in Taneytown.

3. **New Advisory Board Members** – Austin Johnstone, Gary Davis and Nadine Rosendale have been appointed as new Advisory Board members. Gary and Nadine will begin their terms in March.
4. **Strategic Plan Update** – The department updates its strategic plan every three years with the next update due by the end of 2023. Once the new board members join us in March, we will be looking for 2-3 members to work with staff to complete a draft update which would then be presented to the full board for approval.
5. **Piney Run Staffing** – We are in a much better position this year with staffing levels at Piney Run with only 4 Park Assistant positions currently open. We are working with the Human Resources to hold a job fair for Camp Counselors at Piney Run Nature Center on March 4.
6. **Upcoming Meetings** – The March meeting will be held at 1 pm at Hashawha Environmental Center with lunch for Advisory Board members at 12:30 pm. The County Commissioners will be invited to this meeting.
7. **Helping Hands** – Thus far, we have received commitments from 8 groups returning to help with regular clean up days at county parks once again in 2023.
8. **Freedom Park Play Equipment Donations** – We have received a total of \$200k towards new play equipment at Freedom Park from an anonymous donor in addition, the Nathan Chris Baker Foundation has contributed \$50k thus far to this effort and is looking to contribute at least another \$50k and possibly more. State approval for the plan was received February 22<sup>nd</sup>, 2023.

## **BUDGET UPDATES:**

Mr. Degitz provided the board with an update on various Budgets including:

1. **Operating Budget**
  - a) All requests submitted and no major changes anticipated
  - b) Increased funding for tree trimming/removal as this has been a growing issue
2. **Capital Budget**
  - a) The department will begin soliciting input for the capital budget process in March.
  - b) Communication will be sent to the recreation councils and municipalities for requesting ideas for possible capital improvements.
  - c) We will also be posting a link on our web site for citizen input.
  - d) Currently only 3 projects for FY 24 – Cape Horn Park field lights, Piney Run Park paving and first half of tot lot funding for Salt Box Park
  - e) Freedom Park light replacement not currently in plan due to lack of funding

## **E-BIKE DISCUSSION:**

Mr. Degitz prefaced the public invitation for E-bike open comments.

### **1. Introduction to Issue**

- a) Parks ordinance currently prohibits any motorized vehicle on any area except the paved park roads or parking areas or areas designated temporary parking by the Manager
- b) E-bikes are becoming increasingly popular and provide a way for older and less physical able users to enjoy trails
- c) Hashawha/Union Mills is experiencing a growing number of e-bike usage which is currently a violation of ordinance

### **2. Definitions**

- a) E-Bike Definition: motor vehicle with 2 wheels attached to a frame, one behind the other, equipped with fully operable pedals and an electric motor of less than 750 watts
- b) Class 1 E-Bike: Equipped with a motor that provides assistance only when the rider is pedaling and ceases to provide assistance after reaching 20 mph
- c) Class 2 E-Bike: Equipped with a motor that may be used exclusively to propel the e-bike and ceases to provide assistance after reaching 20 mph
- d) Class 3 E-Bike: Motor that provides assistance only when the rider is pedaling and ceases to provide assistance after reaching 28 mph

### **3. How Do Other Agencies Address This Issue:**

- a) National Parks: Class 1 only allowed where traditional bikes are allowed if bikes have power rating of 750w or less
- b) National forests and grasslands: Class 1, 2 and 3 e-bikes are allowed on motorized trails and roads
- c) Maryland State Parks:
  - a. E-bikes permitted on in areas where motorized vehicles are allowed such as interior roads & parking lots
  - b. E-Bikes are prohibited on State Park trails with exception of Torrey Brown and Western Maryland Rail Trails (Class 1 only)

### **4. Goal**

- a) Provide staff with clear avenue to safely expand access and use of trails
- b) Achieve consistency between ordinance and current conditions

### **5. Possible Actions**

- a) No change
- b) Allow only certain class(es) of E-Bikes in all areas
- c) Allow certain class(es) of E-Bikes only in designated areas

## **Public Comments:**

Ken Harris- Hashawha/ Bear Branch volunteer, and leader/coach with local mountain biking groups- Supportive of class one e-bike allowance. Studies (unspecified) support that they cause

minimal damage to trails. Practiced etiquette within the trail using community is to assist with trail repairs. Noted benefits for the aging population with usage of e-bikes.

Rita Baker- Supportive of allowance of class one e-bikes, recently began using one, finds that it allows her to enjoy a freedom and activity that she couldn't partake in without the e-bike's assistance.

Rebecca Friedman- Current avid class one user- Her husband initially began using one after a knee replacement. E-bikes enable riders who do not have the ability or strength to pedal a traditional bike on trails or off. With the honor system and practiced etiquette, foresees the usage of e-bikes allowing valuable memories to be created that otherwise would not be.

Is it difficult to tell the difference with regular bikes and e-bikes, other than the pedals?

Mr. Harris- It is difficult to differentiate Road Class 1 e-bikes and Mountain Bike Class 1 e-bikes. As they evolve it's becoming harder to spot the battery and that they are an e-bike. A speed of 20 MPH is attainable by a pedal bike.

Ms. Friedman- Personal experience has been incapable of achieving a speed of 20 mph with the e-bike. It's a physically challenging to do so.

Deborah Robinson- Member of a hiking group, avid hiker- Could this open a slippery slope to motor bike allowance? She has witnessed trail destruction, and unique floral species disappearing. There are challenges with enforcing existing rules re: dogs on leashes. She has had positive experiences engaging with bike riders on the trail. Concerns about biology preservation, especially toward Union Mills.

Mr. Harris- The practice with his mountain biking group is for the leader to have a small bell on their bike for hikers and horse back riders to know that they are coming.

Mr. Gerkin- Question about opportunities to educate?

Mr. Harris- Encourages activism of park users for enforcement.

Allyson Malachowski- avid hiker and biology enthusiast- Expressed concern for plant life specifically, many unique species grow near trails, has witnessed some disappear. Covid increased the park usage, and pet presence. It can be intimidating for a hiker to share the trail with bikers and equestrians. Encourages groups like Mr. Harris' to continue their initiatives. Has concerns that e-bike usage will evolve into motorcycle usage.

Mike Davis- Finksburg- Class one e-bikes aren't significantly different from traditional bikes. How do you intend to enforce the regulation?

Mr. Degitz- As with dogs, having staff present at all trails always is not possible. Education, signage, and the honor system are widely depended on.

Ms. Friedman- NCR has signage and you still see the bikes. Even current mountain bikes may go off trail (against the rules).

Mr. Harris- Recent signage around Hashawha has been noticed. Prior signs in brown and white, but now in black and white, and people see them. Anticipates arguments from offenders on authority.

Mr. Rosas- There's a lot of like-mindedness among all trail user groups.

Ms. Malachowski- Supports signage.

Mr. Rockwood- Take a photo and send it via email.

John Arnold- Gillis Falls trail user- ATV's and dirt bikes are already being used on the trail. Has never seen an e-bike, but notes that 750 watts is equal to one horsepower. There has been vandalism to signage in the past.

Mr. Rosas- Older model e-bikes had battery packs that looked like water bottles, at this point it's such a small pack and difference that they are very hard to see when there are pedals.

Marjorie Williamson- Hampstead-

- 1- If you only allow class one, is it discriminatory against those who cannot pedal?
- 2- Is this county wide or specific to certain parks?
- 3- Could a speed limit- like a no wake zone in boating- be a solution?

Nelson Bull- Eldersburg- Personal E-bike user due to joints- wife is faster on her traditional bike, it takes significant work to hit 20 mph. E-bikes allow his senior parents to continue to be active and enjoy the outdoors. He doesn't foresee additional damage with class 1 allowance. "The train is here. People are using them."

Mr. Gerkin- Thanked public for participation. Noted that although there were oppositional viewpoints, there wasn't necessarily conflict in that opposition.

Mr. Degitz- Shared emails submitted by the public

Mr. Gerkin- Let's revisit this subject (e-bikes) in March. There was a lot on information to take in tonight.

Mr. Degitz- Union Mills Watershed is a recreation area with a master plan for funding in FY28. There are various piecemeal trails, some never authorized, it will be looked at as a singular parcel. Improvements will prioritize safety, biology, maintenance, and sustainability. There will be ample opportunities for public input during this process.

Mr. Rosas- Surveys and studies prior to this will rely on you (the public) for information and sharing your awareness of what needs protected.

## **NOMINATING COMMITTEE**

Opened the floor to nominations for Chair.

Mr. Gerkin made the motion for David Ferguson, the current Vice-Chair, to be named Chair.

Motion seconded by Ms. Darby. Vote unanimous.

Ms. Vaughn volunteered for Vice-Chair.

Mr. Gerkin made the motion for Meghan Vaughn to be named Vice-Chair. Motion seconded by

Mr. Rosas. Vote unanimous.

## **OTHER BUSINESS:**

A brief discussion took place regarding the information shared and possible solutions for E-bikes including discussion of a possible permit system to raise funds for signage and educational materials, possibly distribute a small bell with the permit. Other discussion referenced permit for usage of Class two bikes to ensure everyone can partake possible establishment of a tip line and additional signage.

## **PUBLIC COMMENTS:**

None

## **ADJOURNMENT:**

The next meeting will be on March 22, 2023, at 12:30 pm meeting at Hashawha or Bear Branch, more information to come. Commissioners are invited to join. On a motion by Tony Rosas, Dave Ferguson seconded, and concurred by all, the meeting adjourned at 8:20 p.m.

Respectfully submitted,

*Jeff R. Degitz*

---

Jeff R. Degitz, Director

*Ashley Caltrider*

---

Ashley Caltrider, Secretary