Future of Covington Parks and Recreation Uncertain after Metropolitan Parks District Measure Fails

The future of parks and recreation in the City of Covington is uncertain. A measure to form a Metropolitan Parks District failed on the November 7, 2006 General Election ballot, leaving City leaders wondering where to turn to satisfy the cravings of a growing community that is looking to the City for parks and recreation activities and opportunities.

City of Covington Proposition No. 1 required approval from greater than 50% of the voters to pass, but received only a 34% approval. It was rejected by a count of 66% to 34%. It is important to note that only 4,439 of the 8,496 registered voters in the City of Covington participated in the November 7th General Election. The measure would have provided funding for ongoing Parks Department operations and the construction and maintenance of parks properties, buildings, fields and facilities. In addition, it would have enabled the City to improve existing undeveloped or underdeveloped park properties, specifically, the construction of athletic fields on the vacant park land at 180th Ave. SE and SE 240th Street, trail improvement and repairs to Jenkins Creek Park and phase one of the Covington Aquatics Center at Tahoma. The Metropolitan Parks District would have also allowed for the continuation of the existing athletics and aquatic activities and restoration and improvement of recreation programs previously cut.

The Covington Council recognizes that parks and recreation programs play a vital role in establishing a community's quality of life, which is the very reason the City has provided these services in recent years. However, in an environment of limited funds, the City is mandated to fund essential services such as police and road maintenance. It is only after those programs are adequately funded that the City can consider supporting discretionary programs such as parks and recreation.

The City of Covington heard from its residents who voted in the November 7, 2006 Election and that voice indicated that the citizens of Covington did not support the measure as proposed. As a result, there are some tough decisions ahead for City officials.

Some of those tough decisions were addressed by the City Council at their meeting on November 14, 2006. The Council made the decision to cancel the 2006-2007 winter basketball program, which will be an approximate net savings of $16,000 to the 2007 budget.

"I absolutely hate the thought of having to cut the program," said Mayor Pro Tem Bud Sizemore. "There are going to be a series of cuts that are required and every one of those cuts are going to be painful. If the ongoing funding mechanism is not there, I do not see how we have any choice but to cut the program."

Councilmember Marlla Mhoon said, "This is a very difficult decision and I don't see that there is any other option. Without the funding other cities in Western Washington receive, prioritizing cuts is necessary. I think this is a time to reach out to the community for input and collectively, we can figure out a solution to this dilemma."

Said Mayor Margaret Harto, "Unfortunately for those of us who felt the opposite way, this community spoke loud and clear last week - and there was an even louder sound from those who didn't take the time to tell us how they felt. Also, when the basketball registrations were sent out it was stated very clearly that program would take place contingent upon the results of the ballot issue. As leaders of this community, we are responsible for looking beyond the November 7th election, beyond December and January – even beyond next year."

There was also a consensus by the Council to put the Aquatics Center expansion project on hold and a motion directing staff to return a $150,000 King County grant, which would have been a 50% grant match, obtained by the City in 2004. This funding could only be used for the purchase of park property currently valued at $750.000.

Councilmember and former Parks and Forestry Commission Chair, Don Henning, noted, "I think we've heard the pros and cons of what we can do and what we do not have the money to do. We should let the money go back to the County because, in the foreseeable future, we couldn't match it to the level that we need to acquire the property."

Further alternatives regarding the services that the Parks and Recreation Department provides to citizens will need to be considered such as:

- The closure of Crystal View, Jenkins Creek and Friendship Parks, along with other city owned open spaces.
- Closure of the 164th Avenue SE Skate Court.
- Elimination of the Holiday Tree Lighting, City Pride, City Hall Art Gallery, Arbor Day and other recreational programs. Programs previously cut would not be reinstated.
- Elimination of youth and adult athletic leagues, programs and camps.
- Reduction of hours, program and/or closure of the Covington Aquatic Center.
- Long term delay and/or elimination of athletic field and community park construction at 180th/240th.
- Long term delay and/or elimination of the planned Covington Aquatic Center improvements.
- Long term delay and/or elimination of Jenkins Creek Park safety improvements.

City staff is also working to develop a menu of investment options in the parks and recreation program for the Council to evaluate.

Through a press release, distributed and placed on the City's website on November 21, 2006, and notice in the City's Weekly Bulletin, contained in the November 20th edition of the King County Journal, the City Council requested and received input from the public on future alternatives and investment options for the Parks and Recreation Program. The community offered comments during the November 14 and 28 City Council meetings and via messages sent to Covington City Hall.

Over the next couple of weeks, City Council members will review alternatives and investment options presented by staff, as well as take into consideration comments and suggestions they have received from the public, in an effort to make additional decisions at their meeting of December 12, 2006, as part of the overall budget deliberations.

For further information, please contact the Covington City Clerk/Public Information Officer at (253) 638-1110, ext. 2234 or the Parks and Recreation Department at (425) 413-7665.

A community newsletter produced by the City of Covington for residents and businesses.

November 2006 *City of Covington*

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Mayor
Margaret Harto

Mayor Pro Tem
Bud Sizemore

Council Members
Don Henning, Mark Lanza, Marlla Mhoon, James A. Scott, Jeff Wagner

The City of Covington UPDATE

Covington Introduces its New Community Development Department

Covington's new Community Development Director, David Nemens, says that his goal is to build a stable, professional department to help guide the City's growth and development.

"In its short life, Covington has seen more than its share of turn-over in its land use planning staff. I'd like to stabilize this staff, and build a solid, professional group of people to serve the citizens of Covington," said Nemens.

The Community Development Department is the newest among City Hall departments: it was first set up in January of this year, and was significantly reorganized and expanded in July. The Community Development Department brings together logically-related functions – such as long-range strategic planning, zoning administration, building permit review and issuance, and code enforcement -- that previously had been spread over several different departments.

Community Development staff help to draft the City's long-range Comprehensive Plan and Development Regulations, administer the land subdivision and commercial building permit processes, oversee the local administration of the State Environmental Policy Act (SEPA), and inspect new homes and commercial buildings to make sure they are safe and ready for occupancy. They work with the City Council, Planning Commission, and Covington Economic Development Council to provide these groups information and recommendations on land use and development issues.

Combining these closely-related functions in one group should result in better coordination between these functions, and more consistency in the decisions the City makes about zoning, land use, and development.

City of Covington Community Development Staff

Back Row L-R: David S. Nemens, Doug Van Gelder, Brian Bykonen, Brian Deibert. Front Row L-R: Rachelle Griswold, Kelly Thompson, Selina Lyons, Robert Meyers. Not Pictured: Carol Barrie, Louis Quintanar, and Christy Carpenter.

David Nemens brings over 28 years of local land use planning and zoning experience to the City. He grew up in New York City and earned masters degrees in both Urban Planning and Landscape Architecture from the University of Michigan at Ann Arbor. He is an AICP certified planner, and a licensed landscape architect in the State of Washington.

Nemens' extensive planning experience includes outside consulting, as well as in-house City staff employment. He has helped a number of communities to reorganize and restructure their staffs and permit processes to achieve better customer service and assure that new development is consistent with local and state land use and environmental goals, policies, and regulations.

The Community Development Department is responsible for the operations of the City's Building Division, Permit Center, Development Review Division, and Strategic Planning and provides staff support to the City Council, Planning Commission and the Economic Development Council.

In addition to David Nemens, the Community Development staff currently includes:

Salina Lyons, Senior Planner
Brian Bykonen, Assistant Planner
Doug VanGelder, Interim Development Review Engineer
Rachelle Griswold, Permit Technician
Kelly Thompson, Permit Technician
Bob Meyers, Building Official
Carol Barrie, Acting Building Official/ Plans Examiner
Brian Deibert, Building Inspector
Louis Quintanar, Code Enforcement Officer
Christy Carpenter, Administrative Assistant

For more information about the City of Covington Community Development Department, please contact the City of Covington at: 253-638-1110 or visit the department section on the City's web site: http://www.ci.covington.wa.us/departments/strategiccommunityplanning.cfm.

City of Covington's First Piano Competition is a Success!

The City of Covington conducted its first piano competition on Saturday, November 11, 2006, at St. John the Baptist Catholic Church in Covington. The inaugural competition, sponsored by the Covington Arts Commission, was open to ages 10 to 18 and 30 applicants participated in the event.

The criteria for selection as a finalist were based on musicality and interpretation, as well as solidity of the performance. Recitalists were asked to perform up to 7 minutes of music of their choice, with each age group being judged according to the length of study and individual performance. The difficulty of the selection was not a factor in determining the winning recitalists.

Ten students were selected as winners of the competition, including a 3-way tie for age 14 category. Those students selected as winners of the competition were: Lauren Baek, age 10; Caelan Creaser, age 11; Charlotte Dittmar, age 12; Daniel Ablog, age 13; Michael Messer, age 14; Thomas Rothschilds, age 14; George Fricks, age 14; Alexander Li, age 15; Samantha Yeung, age 16; and Aaron Smith, age 17.

Students receiving honorable mention in the competition were: Stanley Hu, age 11; Shane Wilson, age 11; Jon Martz, age 15; Courtney Smith, age 15; Emily Hsieh, age 15; and Breanna Snodgrass, age 17.

Winners and Students Receiving Honorable Mention at The November 11, 2006 City of Covington Piano Competition.

The competition was judged by Amy Grinsteiner, a piano professor with Pacific Lutheran University. Winning students were announced at a special recital held after the competition took place and were presented with trophies and cash prizes made possible through donations from area businesses and funds generated from the $15 application fee for the competition. All participants were presented with a participation certificate and ribbon.

"I am very glad that this event affected a lot of people in a positive way," said Arts Commission Deanna Dent. "We are looking forward to making this an annual event in the City of Covington."

Arts Commission Chair Betty Nomura said, "This was an awesome event. We were delightfully surprised that we had over 125 people attending the competition. "

The Covington Arts Commission would like to express special thanks to Ms. Grinsteiner, for her performance as adjudicator, St. John the Baptist Catholic Church for accommodating the event, Councilmember Don Henning for assisting with the presentation of awards, and to Parks and Recreation Director Dave Erickson, Aquatic Supervisor Pat Patterson, and Parks & Recreation Administrative Assistant Janine Zeitler for their assistance in making this event possible.

The City of Covington UPDATE

SE 256th St/164th Ave SE Street Improvement Project

Work continues on the SE 256th Street/164th Avenue SE Street Improvement project. Due to recent heavy rains, work has slowed on the project. The contractor has now installed over 37,000 lineal feet of underground utility conduit and 4,700 lineal feet of storm drainage pipe. Work on the utilities continues on SE 256th Street and 164th Avenue SE. The storm drainage system is essentially complete, including installation of the 36-inch diameter storm drain pipe connecting into The Reserve regional facility, the 48-inch diameter storm detention pipes and the stormwater filter vaults. The treatment vaults are complete but will not be outfitted with the filter media until after the roads are paved. Otherwise, the filter media may become clogged during the winter months with construction runoff.

Contractor installing utility vaults and backfilling conduits with sand.

At the west end of the project, pouring of concrete curb and gutter has begun and will continue to the east towards the future roundabout. The contractor has relocated some of the fire hydrants along the corridor, and installation of the new 8-, 12-, and 16-inch diameter water mains has begun. In general, the contractor will continue with this work plus some of the same type of work that has been going on since July. Specifically, installation of underground utilities, curb & gutter, retaining walls, and grading operations will be the normal activities for the next several months.

Pipes and More Pipes

Did you know that the first evidence of engineered plumbing dates as far back as 4,000 years in the Mediterranean and Middle East regions of the world? In the early stages of domestic water supply, sewerage, and drainage works, water was typically collected from the higher elevations from a spring and channeled down into the cities via an aqueduct either carved from the rock hillside or constructed of rock or masonry channels, sometimes elevated with towering arches of stone. Since there were no pumps available at the time to lift and pressurize the water supply, all the water had to flow by gravity from the hills, through the city's plumbing system, and into the sea or river for disposal. Elaborate piping or channels were used to route fresh flowing water through the upper floors of buildings, then wastewater drained into the lower portions and combined with storm runoff for conveyance into the sea. Early pipes were made of terra cotta clay, lead, and copper. Some cast iron water pipes constructed in Europe in the 1660's are still in use today, as are stone sewers from ancient Rome.

Today, we have the benefit of incredible manufacturing capabilities and access to many different types of materials. We also have a great demand for services at our homes and businesses. Water, wastewater, drainage, natural gas, steam, and even electrical wires and communication lines all use pipes to either collect or distribute the "necessities" of life to our very fingertips. Pipes come in all different sizes (diameter), wall thickness, and length and are joined together in dozens of different ways depending on the use. Some are glued together; others are welded, clamped or pushed together, with or without gaskets. In the United States, many of the older pipes are wood, clay, concrete, or cast iron. The Seattle Public Utility replaced the last few sections of wood stave water pipes in the last decade. These large diameter pipes had served to convey water from the Cascades into Seattle for almost a hundred years. Newer pipes can be plastic, ductile iron (an iron and magnesium alloy), aluminum, steel, or concrete.

For sanitary sewer, PVC (polyvinyl chloride) pipes are very common for newer systems, although ductile pipes are used under certain conditions. Sewer systems consisting of "open" gravity pipes are typically laid at a slope sufficient to maintain a minimum flow velocity so that the pipe stays clear of debris. This velocity is typically 3 feet per second and is termed "scouring velocity". The open part of the system means that the system is not under pressure and flows freely by gravity. Manholes provide ventilation and access for maintenance and serve as a junction for multiple pipes and for changes in direction or slope. Sanitary sewer systems are susceptible to corrosion when bacteria reduce sulfates that are present in the sewage into hydrogen sulfide gas, and then convert the gas to sulfuric acid, which can corrode concrete and metal pipes. Clay and plastic pipes are not affected as much from this corrosion process. Storm drainage systems are also open gravity systems and pipes can be made of many different types of materials, with the most common PVC, HDPE (high density polyethylene), concrete, and corrugated metal. Drainage pipes can be corrugated or smooth wall. The smooth wall interior pipes are able to convey water at a rate about seventy percent higher than corrugated pipes of the same size. Where needed, pump stations can be used to "lift" water in the gravity system over a higher elevation such as a hill or where adequate slope is not available to continue the gravity system. This is very common for sanitary sewer systems.

Water systems are generally constructed with ductile iron and PVC pipe, since these systems are pressurized. These types of pipes come in standard sizes and wall thickness to address a multitude of pressure and external loading conditions. Because the system is under pressure, at every change of direction, the pipes must be either mechanically restrained or placed against a concrete "thrust block" to prevent the forces at the bend from pulling the pipes apart. Valves are typically installed at each intersection of pipes, so that a specific part of the system can be isolated for repairs. Other types of fittings and appurtenances for a water system include check valves, fire hydrants, backflow preventers, air-vacuum and air relief valves, and pressure-regulating valves.

Designing and constructing water, sewer, and drainage systems is a core aspect of public works and has been in practice for many centuries. Design is complicated today due to existing conditions and physical constraints (including other utilities, topographic changes, location of poor soils or bedrock, traffic impacts during construction, etc.), connections to existing systems, regulations, and of course, available resources. Once constructed, these systems are flushed and tested to verify compliance with specific engineering standards. A significant amount of the time for constructing these systems is connecting all of the individual services to the mains and restoring the ground surface under which they have been installed.

Contractor installing 48-inch diameter asphalt-coated and galvanized corrugated metal storm detention pipes and control structure manholes.

CONTACTS

Over the next two years, City staff will be providing monthly updates regarding this project (and other projects) through articles in this newsletter, official news releases, and the project's website: http://www.g-o.com/covington/main.html . Citizens are encouraged to periodically view the website for updates and to provide feedback to the City staff regarding the project. Specific comments can be addressed through the Covington Connection link on the project website, or the City's main web page at http://ci.covington.wa.us/connection.cfm.