



Recreation and Parks Commission

Meeting Minutes

January 16, 2024 at 12:30pm

Alamance Parks Administrative Office • 3916 R. Dean Coleman Rd, Burlington

COMMISSION MEMBERS PRESENT:

Chair Ms. Lisa Wolff, Vice-Chair Mr. Peter Dahl, Commissioner Bill T. Lashley, Mr. David Woody, Ms. Kelly Ronnow, Mr. Mike Dunning, Dr. Harold Kernodle, Mr. Thomas Purcell, Mr. Craig Yokeley, Ms. Elizabeth Read

ALAMANCE PARKS STAFF PRESENT:

Jamie Merchel, Director; Jason Witherspoon, Programs Superintendent; Nolan Carter, Trails and Open Space Coordinator; Anna Bowland, Grants & Communications Coordinator; Guil Johnson, Athletics Director

PUBLIC PRESENT:

None

1) COMMUNICATIONS

- a) The meeting was called to order and a quorum established at 12:38 pm
- b) The November 21, 23 meeting minutes were approved unanimously upon the motion of Peter Dahl and second of Bill Lashley.

2) PUBLIC COMMENT

None

3) REPORT OF CHAIRMAN

None

4) REPORT OF STAFF

- a) Monthly Department Report: Director Jamie Merchel gave Department updates:
 - Several staff were recognized for celebrating milestone anniversaries with the Department this year: Terry Isley, Southern Parks Manager – 25 years; Ernie Haynes, Park Technician II – 10 years; Nolan Carter, Trails and Open Space Coordinator – 5 years; Anna Bowland, Grants & Communications Coordinator – 5 years.
 - To show appreciation for volunteer work done during 2023, volunteers were sent an email appreciation letter and RecDesk credit of \$30 to be used on a park program or rental. Staff has received positive feedback from this gesture.
 - The Haw River Trail website is undergoing renovation with the help of a third-party vendor. The goal is that the website will be up and running by the spring.
 - The Textile Heritage Museum will celebrate its 20th anniversary at the Founder's Day celebration on April 27. The museum is also hosting a monthly lecture series beginning in May.
 - Cedarock Park was stocked with trout in mid-December. Trout fishing is once again very popular at the park, with over 200 day passes being sold in December.



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5) OLD BUSINESS

a) Haw River Trail:

- Peter Dahl reported that volunteers are continuing to build trail in Saxapahaw north of the dam. The trail is approximately 95% complete. Nolan will flag the trail and add it to the All Trails App once fully complete.
- Jamie gave an update regarding the grant process for applying for any state or federal grant for Haw River State Trail. As the lead partner with North Carolina State Trails, Alamance County will be responsible for submitting all grant applications on behalf of the trail. Individual partners/trail sections will be able to collaborate on the grant applications through the online WebGrants system, but Alamance County will ultimately submit the application and accept grant funds on behalf of the trail (which would in turn be given to the appropriate trail section partner). Jamie noted that a board has been established to oversee the Haw River State Trail and the group is still in the process of formalizing the bylaws and 5-year plans. Elizabeth Read noted that the Department should keep records of the total time spent managing grants on behalf of the partnership, as this overhead cost is often reimbursed in these types of partnerships.

b) Cane Creek Mountains Natural Area:

- Peter reported that the Friends group began work this week on Phase 3 trail. The trail will be a 2-mile loop with flat, easy walking. Nolan explained that a second trail will be built at the Phase 3 Trailhead that will be more challenging with elevation and will connect to trails on the Pine Hill Trailhead.
- Lisa Wolff suggested that the Department consider trails with ADA access. There is only 1 trail in the Alamance Parks network that is ADA accessible and there is an increasing demand for accessible trails. The Accessibility for Parks Grant is a great funding resource.
- Jamie gave an update on the tower. The current permit requires that the tower is built with non-combustible materials. Composite material will not be a feasible, cost-saving option. The Department has budgeted the project based on constructing a tower of wood material and is lacking \$155,000 in funds for the all steel design. Staff are reaching out to the Alamance County Inspections Department again to determine if a permit can be obtained for a tower with wood construction.

c) Cedarrock Park Playground:

- Jamie reported that the purchase order for the playground is submitted and the project is on schedule. Construction is expected to begin in March.

d) BE Jordan Renovation:



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- Jamie reported that demolition is complete and the site is being prepared for the new amenities. The goal is to complete the project by the fall when students are returning to school.
- e) Great Alamance Creek Development:
 - Engagement and Outreach Summary – Jamie reported that the Department participated in two outreach events in December, the Downtown Burlington Holiday Magic event and the Rambling River Mercantile Makers Market. Both events resulted in around 25 completed surveys each and feedback was positive for the Great Alamance Creek Trail project.
 - Great Alamance Creek Trail Study Input – Jamie asked the board for feedback about the Great Alamance Creek project for the trail study which is being conducted by Alta Consulting. Board members provided the following feedback:
 - (1) The Great Alamance Creek area is an untapped resource. It is close to the central and urban area of Burlington which is a great, visible location to develop a park.
 - (2) Areas that the board felt needed improvement included the trailhead/parking area to include restrooms, low water levels in the creek during the summer season, speed of nearby traffic and pedestrian safety concerns, and river/creek cleanup efforts.
 - (3) Board members hoped that the study would assist in the development of more recreation facilities, increase community buy-in, and improve Alamance County's partnership with Chatham County.
 - (4) Agencies and individuals integral to accomplishing improvement goals were listed as: volunteer trail builders, historical groups to interpret the area's history, the Village of Alamance, private businesses like Haw River Canoe & Kayak Company, accessibility/ADA organizations, and the local community.
- f) Cedarock Equestrian Horse Rides Contractor:
 - Jamie and Jason updated the board that no proposal submissions had been received for an Equestrian vendor to offer horse rides at Cedarock Park. Lisa asked if it were an option to run the program from in-house. This is possible but the financial cost to supply horses and staffing is a concern. Lisa suggested that the Department reach out to Copper Top Equestrian Center. Jason will follow up with this organization to explore options.

6) NEW BUSINESS

- a) Alamance Parks Programming:
 - Programs Superintendent, Jason Witherspoon presented a flyer listing the planned 2024 program opportunities. These included events sponsored by Alamance Parks, Haw River Trail, Special Olympics Alamance County, the Textile Heritage Museum, Youth Athletics, and third party sponsored events open to the public but held at Alamance Parks locations.



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- Trailathlon is back this year on March 23 at Glencoe. This multi-sport adventure race starts with a two-mile round-trip paddle, followed by a seven-mile rolling countryside bike ride, and finishes with a hilly 5K trail run. Trailathlon is a partnership between Alamance Parks, Burlington Recreation & Parks, and Haw River Canoe & Kayak Company.
- The Archery program experienced a record season during the fall of 2023 with 80 enrolled students with a waitlist. Jason reported that there is interest behind starting a local club for advanced students from the program.
- The AIR (Adaptive & Inclusive Recreation) program is hosting the AIR Basketball Tournament once again this year on April 20. This tournament invites local businesses and police and fire departments to sponsor teams and play alongside AIR program athletics. The tournament is very popular among athletes and draws great community support.
- The Haw River Camp & Clean will be held on May 18-19 at Shallow Ford Natural Area and will include land and paddle trail cleanup opportunities.

b) Alamance Athletics – Proposed Programming Modifications:

- Jason presented a proposal for programming modifications for Alamance County Athletics. Key changes of the proposal include: rethinking public/private partnerships, updating the athletics model to offer more sports to more kids with a lower threshold for entry, adapting program offerings to accommodate busy families by offering predictable schedules, and reducing overhead costs to make all of our efforts scalable.
- The board requested to revisit the proposed changes at the February board meeting. No official action taken.
- Lisa recommend the possible establishment of a subcommittee for this topic and volunteered herself to be a part of it. Elizabeth Reed expressed interest in the subcommittee as well.

c) Grant Application for the Z. Smith Reynolds Community Progress Fund for Alamance Afterschool Athletics:

Jamie presented the opportunity for the Department to apply for the Z. Smith Reynolds Community Progress Fund grant to initiate a trail of the Afterschool Athletics program. The grant request is for a total of \$47,600 in funds over two years (Summer 2024 through Spring 2026) to purchase equipment and pay part-time staff to run the program. Upon the motion of Lisa Wolff and second of Peter Dahl, the board unanimously supported the Department's grant application.

7) ADJOURNMENT

The meeting was adjourned at 2:30pm by acclamation.