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Press Release

Beautification and Tree Advisory Board tables park proposal

Proposed park adoption policy needs more work, to be on February agenda

ARKANSAS CITY, Kan. (February 4, 2016) — The Arkansas City Beautification and Tree Advisory Board met Jan. 28 at City Hall to continue work on a new process for groups that want to adopt parks.

After much discussion, however, the board voted 4-0 to table a proposed adoption policy until its next meeting at noon Feb. 25 in the city manager's office at City Hall.

Board members present last week were Michelle Dykes, Bob Foster, Candace Stephens and Jill Wineinger. Steven Walker has resigned from the board, which needs a minimum of five members.

Residents interested in being appointed to the board are encouraged to fill out a form in the city clerk's office at City Hall or contact Andrew Lawson, public information officer, at (620) 441-4415 or alawson@arkansascityks.gov for more information. All appointments are made by the City Commission.

The three-page policy draft discussed last week by the board spells out the process by which civic groups, nonprofit organizations or residents interested in "adopting" a park would submit an application.

Park adoption would help to finance improvements, reduce the labor burden on the City's Parks and Facilities Division, and create an outlet for community concerns about park direction and maintenance.

Activities that potential applicants could help with in the City's parks include:

- Erecting equipment and structures;
- Mowing grass and trimming trees;
- Painting benches and signs;
- Picking up litter and trash;
- Picking up tree limbs and debris;
- Planting flowers, shrubs and trees;
- Raising funds for, purchasing and maintaining new playground equipment, shelters or benches;

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- Watching and patrolling the park to prevent vandalism.

If multiple entities are interested in adopting the same park, the board could choose to publish a request for proposals, with each applicant outlining its plan for the park and pledging a certain amount of annual volunteer hours and/or funding contributions.

The beautification board then would be responsible for evaluating the applications and making a recommendation to the City Commission as to which group is best suited for that particular park.

The final say would rest with the City Commission. Staff would be responsible for maintaining a list of park adoptees and their contact information, and ensuring they follow through on their commitments.

The proposed policy also spells out what information applicants should provide regarding their proposed funding stream, including an annual commitment of funds, how maintenance and replacement will be handled, and whether the group will accept tax-deductible donations, grants or matching funds.

It specifies that the City will continue to own and insure the parks, and also that final decisions about changing aspects of the park will remain with the City Commission or the parks and facilities director.

Finally, the policy tries to set out some minimum requirements for considering renaming requests.

This last section was identified by board members as the one most in need of revision. They requested that staff rework some of it, as well as some other details throughout the document. The final policy also will need to be reviewed by the city manager and city attorney prior to its approval.

The idea of park adoption arose out of 1 1/2 months of discussions at the City Commission level, spanning multiple meetings, after playground equipment was removed from Catalpa Park, 1824 N. 11th St. A group of neighborhood residents and concerned citizens protested the action at several meetings.

One of the residents, Allen Fisk, attended last week's meeting. He represents a group of other concerned residents who hope to work with the nearby Ark City Church of the Nazarene, which is just north of the park. The group will meet Feb. 13 to discuss the basics of the proposed policy, Fisk said.

Board members also picked the Nelson Sensation Award winner for the month of February. The recipient will be announced later this week on Facebook and in the Traveler. No Yard of the Season awards were given out for this month, however, due to a lack of nominations.

Citizens may nominate a yard for the board's consideration for either award by emailing the address — and, if they like, a photo — of the yard to alawson@arkansascityks.gov. In other business, the board:

- Approved the Dec. 3, 2015, special meeting minutes as presented.

- Discussed briefly whether to regulate advertising on benches in downtown Arkansas City. The board asked for more information to be presented at its February meeting.
- Briefly discussed whether to host an Earth Day event in April. Because there is not much time left for planning, the board decided to focus on planning a big event in 2017 and simply support whatever the Arkansas City Area Chamber of Commerce is doing for Arbor Day this year.