The regular monthly meeting of the Baltimore County Recreation and Parks Board was held on Wednesday, October 16, 2019, at 6:30 p.m., at Department Headquarters, Cockeysville, Maryland. In attendance were Chuck Munzert, Chairman, Greg Heitner, Vice Chairman; board members Mike Milani, Leslie Monfred, Eric van den Beemt, Isaac Manjoe, Skip Hammond, Chip Hiebler, Corey Johns and Ryleigh Casserly. Recreation and Parks department staff included Keith Williams, Acting Director, Bob Smith, Chief of Recreation Services, and Kara Burman, Regional Coordinator, Region 1.

Call to Order:

Chairman Chuck Munzert called the meeting to order at 6:42 p.m.

Comments by Individual Citizens:

Several people attended from the Friends of Benjamin Banneker Historical Park and Museum (the Friends). Al Robinson, a newly elected member, addressed the Board, referencing the email Cynthia deJesus (President of the Friends) received from the Board of Recreation and Parks. Mr. Robinson voiced his concern with the fact that there were no specifics referenced in the email, with the drastic action taken by the Board, and with not having an explanation. He informed board members that their records go by fiscal year, not calendar year. He stated that records were provided, none of which were in violation of code or state law, and were referred to as sloppy bookkeeping. Mr. Robinson stated that being told the Friends are no longer the council of record, he has concern about due process and specificity, stating that he needs to see why this action was taken. He stated that there was no corrective action provided, just an end result. The Friends attend to appeal this decision.

Mr. Robinson stated that this is the first time he has heard of a council decertified because of poor bookkeeping. Chip Hiebler replied, stating that in his review of the 2018 finances, he identified $4,200 in discrepancies. He stated that there was no reason to suspect improprieties, further stating that it was bad finances. Mr. Hiebler stated that there are other issues, including that the Friends’ President is the only approver of every check request. In addition, Mr. Hiebler reported that he met with three members to request documents. Thereafter, the secretary removed financial documents from the Benjamin Banneker Historical Park and Museum (the Museum) and replaced them with other documents. Furthermore, Mr. Hiebler stated that not in 12 months did recipients, indicating they received funds, sign the honorariums. Mike Milani commented that there were issues with the Friends in 2015 and 2016, which the Board addressed; this is not the first time. Mr. Munzert stated that this has been an ongoing issue for the past four years. Discussion ensued.

Vice Chairman Greg Heitner asked about programs that were not happening because of the Board’s decision. Mr. Robinson replied, stating that the genealogy program and bus trips were not proceeding. Skip Hammond read from the email sent to Ms. deJesus regarding the completion of programs already taking place. The email states that those programs run exclusively by the Friends that are currently in progress can be completed, which includes the current session of Trace Your Roots, scheduled for September 28 and October 19, and the Harriet Tubman bus trip scheduled for October 5. Mr. Hammond asked attendees what documents they had to refute
this. Charnetta Holman, Treasurer of the Friends, stated that they never received the results from the financial review, and therefore never had a chance to refute anything.

Acting Director Keith Williams replied, stating that he wanted to make certain a few things were clear: recreation/nature councils are not part of Baltimore County Government, they are independent 501(c) 3 organizations, and he said he could not speak of what may have happened at the Museum, but staff should not be handling the Friends’ money. Jeffrey Budnitz, a long-time volunteer, stated that if things get to this point, it is a problem; there should not be a single penny unaccounted. Mr. Budnitz stated he has heard of the issues regarding the Friends for years. He has volunteered at this site as well. His presence tonight is to support the Board, and he stated that he feels the Board’s actions are legitimate. Mr. Budnitz stated that he thinks this site could be fantastic; however, as a taxpayer, he thinks this is a problem. Fred Hickok stated that the last internal audit was performed in FY18. Mr. Munzert thanked all for coming out and told them the Board would discuss this matter and contact Ms. deJesus. Mr. Budnitz reported that he has volunteered for Judy Miller, stating that the Benjamin Banneker Foundation (the Foundation) is very committed.

**Board Member Activities:**

Corey Johns reported that he attended multiple council meetings (10 to be exact), and put together questions he has encountered regarding background checks. He thinks a FAQ sheet should be distributed.

Eric van den Beemt attended a meeting with the Maryland Agricultural Resource Council officials. They relayed their concerns about something else happening to interfere with what they are trying to do. Mr. Williams stated he would assist with a document giving them the ability to provide input regarding the site. On another note, Mr. van den Beemt attended Family Farm Day, reporting that it was a very nice program and a great day with lots of attendees.

**Director's Comments:**

Mr. Williams reported on a number of recent festivals, including Family Farm Day at the Baltimore County Center for Maryland Agriculture and Farm Park (Ag Center) and others at Cromwell Valley Park, Marshy Point Nature Center and Oregon Ridge Nature Center, bringing out over 10,000 visitors combined.

Mr. Williams reported that he is in the process of writing the job description for the Farm Manager for the Ag Center.

**Old Business:**

Mr. Hiebler stated that the Friends do virtually nothing to support the park in which they exist. The Friends went to Councilman Tom Quirk’s office, prior to coming before the Board. Mr. Hiebler stated that he believes they were told that this is a Recreation and Parks issue. Mr. Milani stated that they should never have allowed two groups to operate at this site. The Board should have pushed this issue. He further stated that he does not think anything discussed in the past has been corrected. Mr. Hiebler stated that the programs that support the mission of the Friends and the legacy of Benjamin Banneker are all run by the County, on a regular basis. There are six to eight programs each month and camps during the summer. The primary programs run by the Friends are the three jazz concerts held during the summer, Trace Your Roots and bus trips. The Colonial Market Fair is run by the Foundation. They submitted a letter of intent, requesting to be the recognized council at this site. Mr. Hiebler does not believe this group is ready, stating that they need new by-laws. He further stated that they could eventually be the council on record. Discussion ensued. See item under “Action.” Bob Smith suggested including in the letter to Ms. deJesus, that as a non-profit, they still have the right to request
use of facilities. Discussion ensued. Mr. Williams commented that the Museum is going to shut down early November for 6–8 weeks. Mr. van den Beemt requested that Councilman Quirk be copied on the letter.

Regarding background checks, Mr. Williams stated that he received information from County Administrative Officer Stacy Rodgers, indicating that the County is moving forward with CJIS. The County is in the process of purchasing three fingerprinting machines. The following agencies will each have a machine: Recreation and Parks, Human Resources and Health. In addition, we are in the process of organizing sessions to take place once we get equipment up and running. Mr. Williams informed Ms. Rodgers that we have an average of 8,000 background checks each year. Mr. Williams told board members that the County is soliciting their input regarding locations to hold these sessions (schools can be included). Mr. Hammond suggested Southeast Regional Recreation Center, Leslie Monfred suggested Oregon Ridge Lodge, and Mr. Heitner suggested regional facilities. Board members were asked to send their suggestions to Mr. Smith via email. Mr. Smith reminded them to be conscious of the sites they select, as sessions would affect recreation/activities at these sites. Mr. Williams stated that the County is trying to get this done by March.

Regarding Liberty Road Recreation Council (LRRC) basketball, Isaac Manjoe drafted a letter after the regular meeting of the Board of Recreation and Parks, on September 11. Mr. Munzert reported that he had a meeting to discuss the LRRC. Mr. Milani interjected, stating that he has never heard of half the Board meeting with people to discuss issues, further stating that he thinks it is not appropriate and is highly offended. Mr. van den Beemt agreed. Mr. Munzert reported that the meeting was to ensure that the LRRC was not shut down. Mr. Munzert reported that the entire LRRC Board is gone, and elections are scheduled to take place tonight. The Board has the power to ban named volunteers in a letter. In addition, the County is supplying a person to work with the LRRC for six months. Mr. Hammond replied, asking why a person has not been assigned to work with Gray Charles Recreation Council.

Regarding recertification, board members discussed those councils in noncompliance. Mr. Milani stated that he was okay with giving Baltimore Highlands Recreation Council an extension, and he would request the missing form from Catonsville Recreation Council. We are waiting on a form from Greater Pikesville Recreation Council, and Mr. Munzert stated that he received documents from the Owings Mills Recreation Council. Ms. Monfred stated that she was told Towsontowne Recreation Council would submit their documents next week. Mr. van den Beemt discussed Cockeysville Recreation Council. Mr. Williams stated that the President of the Cockeysville Recreation Council requested a meeting with Ms. Rodgers regarding background checks. Mr. van den Beemt is agreeable to wait until after this meeting, giving them another month. Regarding Prettyboy Recreation Council, Mr. van den Beemt stated that he has been in touch with them and believes he has answered all of their questions. He stated that they are trying to get this done. Mr. Manjoe reported that Liberty Road Recreation Council is working on this. Mr. Johns was told that the documents from Greater Loch Raven Recreation Council were on the way, and commented that he would give them an extension. As for Overlea-Fullerton Recreation Council, they told Mr. Johns they submitted their information. Mr. Munzert will follow up with them. Mr. Hammond reported that he is working with Gray Charles Recreation Council.

New Business:

Mr. Munzert reported that Kaitlin Brennan, the Program Director of Leveling the Playing Field Baltimore, contacted the Board. Leveling the Playing Field is new to the area, based in Hampden. The organization collects used sporting equipment, and after cleaning it up, supplies the equipment to those in need. Board members were invited to see this operation and get a firsthand explanation on how it works. Several board members expressed interest in joining Mr. Munzert on this visit. Mr. Munzert stated that he would arrange this and be in touch with fellow members.
Mr. Hammond stated that those on the southeast side of the County have been asking for some time about the unused Maryland Healthy Working Families Act (the Act) payments. He is referencing the 3% additional fringe collected to counter the Act. Mr. Hammond stated that the problem some of the councils are having is some staff are not working enough hours to utilize this money. Mr. Williams replied, stating that this was set up so when people take leave, there is money there to pay them. This money is already in the Group Leadership (GL) account. The GL account was set up with the intent that councils would predict staffing needs and pay the salaries ahead of time; however, most are not doing that. Mr. Hammond stated that something needs to be done about this. Mr. Smith stated that this is part of the GL balance and can continue to expend. Mr. Hammond stated that Berkshire-Eastwood Recreation Council has been paying this fringe and have not had to use this. They have a couple hundred dollars in the account. Mr. Hammond inquired into at what point do you say the council will not be charged anymore for this, or allow them to use this money as needed. Discussion ensued. Mr. Williams stated that the money is there, and if the council is not in the red then they can stop paying this. Mr. Smith replied, stating that any money the council puts in the GL account is staying there.

**Action:**

Regarding the Friends, Mr. van den Beemt motioned to reject their appeal, Mr. Hiebler seconded the motion and all were in favor, with the exception of Mr. Milani who abstained from the vote.

Mr. Milani motioned to recertify the following councils: Reisterstown, Towson, Cromwell Valley Park, Hereford, Oregon Ridge, Woodlawn, Parkville, Bengies-Chase, Marshy Point, Middle River, Rosedale, Bear Creek, Edgemere-Sparrows Point, North Point Village, Turner Station and West Inverness, Mr. Heitner seconded the motion, and all were in favor.

**Adjournment:**

There being no further business, Mr. Heitner moved to adjourn the meeting, Ms. Monfred seconded the motion, and all were in favor. The meeting adjourned at 8:19 p.m.

Respectfully Submitted,

Lisa Winters