

Beaufort County Passive Park Work Plan Listening Sessions

October 2, 2018 and October 4, 2018

Summary Notes

General Comments

Most attendees voiced their approval of the creation of the plan and were happy to see that it was produced. Many attendees also encouraged their peers to attend the park specific stakeholder workshops as they come up to provide their citizen input and community needs.

Some attendees had concerns about particular parks that are not owned by the County. The County will continue to strive to cooperate with the municipalities where it can, but encourages citizens to voice their concerns about municipal parks with their City/Town representatives.

There was overall citizen support for keeping the Rural and Critical properties as passive recreation for the enjoyment of the natural beauty of Beaufort County. Passive recreation is defined by County code as "Recreation requiring little or no physical exertion focusing on the enjoyment of one's natural surroundings. In determining appropriate recreational uses of passive parks, the promotion and development of resource-based activities such as fishing, camping, hunting, boating, gardening, bicycling, nature studies, horse-back riding, visiting historic sites, hiking, etc., shall be the predominate measure for passive park utilization."

Some attendees expressed their concern about the lack of transparency in the past with the Rural and Critical Lands and park development activities. The County is rectifying that concern through the work plan as provided, as well as conducting park specific stakeholder workshops during the planning phase of each property.

Passive Park Program Comments

Some attendees voiced their concern that a passive parks advisory body be created.

County staff, administration, and Council will continue to have discussions on the need for such a body, the process of how that body may be formed, what the role of that advisory body would be if formed, and how staff would interact with that body. At this time, citizens will have opportunity to provide their input at individual park stakeholder workshops during each property's planning phase.

One attendee voiced concern regarding more proactive marketing of the passive parks.

As mentioned in the Work Plan, branding and marketing of the County's passive parks is one of the areas that a standard needs to be developed, and will be worked on in the near future.

Some attendees asked about the program budget.

In the last two bond referenda, and in the upcoming one, there was a statement that an amount "not to exceed 20%" would be allowed to be used for park improvements on Rural and Critical Lands Preservation Program properties. At this time, the passive park program is working off of those funds for planning and construction for public access. However, maintenance and

operations are not allowable costs for those funds. Therefore the work plan specifies various revenue generating activities that could occur on various properties, which would be applicable towards operations and maintenance of the passive parks. Additionally, the county will continue to work with municipalities and other groups to create partnerships for long-term park maintenance. The County also plans on seeking out other funding opportunities in the form of leases, timber management, grants, and possibly ad valorem taxes.

Many attendees voiced their concern that volunteers be utilized by the County for park properties.

The County certainly plans on creating partnerships with various groups and individual volunteers to utilize the energy and enthusiasm for interpretive programming and maintenance activities on the various properties as they come on-line for public access. Those partnerships will be formalized in a Memorandum of Understanding between the County and partnering group.

Specific Questions

Q: Can you speak a little about the horse park? Are there still plans for a horse park/trail?

A: The Okatie Preserve equestrian park was reevaluated due to environmental concerns regarding the fecal coliform Total Maximum Daily Load (TMDL) associated with the Okatie River. The project on that property has been terminated at this time, but other properties will be evaluated for appropriateness and need.

Q: Is the County involved in, or will they be involved in, differences of abutting neighborhoods?

A: If there is a conflict between a neighborhood and a County park then yes, the County will address the concern.

Q: How are these properties identified on the ground and how can we get to them?

A: At this time, very few properties are open to the public and most don't have access points. The work plan provides a prioritization of properties to be planned for public access and, at the time of development, they will have an access location and trails clearly identified with signage. Additionally, the county website is in progress of being updated and a passive parks webpage will have location information, a map, and a description of each property as it becomes open to the public.

Q: What about other county owned properties?

A: County Council makes decisions about other properties owned by the County that are not part of the passive park program.

Q: How did the passive park charge get defined?

A: Based on the passive park manager job description.

Q: How do the Tier 3 properties rise up in priority?

A: Contact the Passive Parks Manager and/or your Council representative to let them know of your concerns, needs, or desires for a particular property.