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CITY OF MANHATTAN BEACH
MINUTES OF THE PARKS & RECREATION COMMISSION

February 27, 2006
6:30 P.M.

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ROLL CALL

Present: Commissioners Cohen, Gill, Harris, Lamb, Lear and Paralusz

Absent: Commissioner Marrill

Others Present: Parks and Recreation Director Richard Gill, Recreation Services
Manager Idris J. Al-Oboudi, Recording Secretary Jane Grace and others
(see attached list)

AGENDA CHANGES

None

APPROVAL OF MINUTES

The minutes of the November 14, 2005 Commission Meeting were approved as written.

CEREMONIAL

None

GENERAL BUSINESS

06/0227.1 – Consideration of Renaming Parque Culiacan to Rosa Parks Park

Mr. Al-Oboudi reported that During the December 6, 2005 City Council meeting, the City Council, at the request of a resident, directed the Parks and Recreation Commission to discuss and consider the renaming of Parque Culiacan in honor of civil rights leader Rosa Parks.

Mr. Al-Oboudi reported that Parque Culiacan is the City’s oldest park and is located between 26th and 27th Street on the west side of Highland Avenue. Parque Culiacan is named after the City of Manhattan Beach’s original Sister City Culiacan, Mexico. It was originally named Bay View Terrace in 1962 and later changed to Parque Culiacan in 1974.

Mr. Al-Oboudi reported that the park began its life in the 1920's. The City Council initiated eminent domain proceedings to take the property located from the Strand to Highland Avenue between 26th & 27th Streets and all families were dispossessed of their property. The circumstances of the eminent domain proceedings have led some historians to conclude that the actions were racially motivated, as the proceedings did include the removal of a popular beach resort for black families (Bruce's Beach) and also dispossessed a number of black families from their homes.

If the request is approved, the cost to replace the park monument sign is approximately \$8,000-\$10,000.

Mr. Al-Oboudi reported that the Leadership Manhattan class of 2003 undertook a class project to rename Parque Culiacan. They received permission from City Council to conduct a community-wide contest for a new name. After several months, the Leadership class returned to the City Council with the recommendation of renaming Parque Culiacan to Friendship Park. During the meeting, the Sister City's Organization representatives protested the recommendation and stated that it was inappropriate to drop the original Sister City's name Culiacan from the park. The City Council denied the recommendation of Friendship Park. They did approve erecting a new monument sign, keeping the name Culiacan and allowing a plaque to be placed on the monument that would recognize the origin of the park. The Leadership Manhattan Class of 2003 paid approximately \$7,500 for the new monument sign and plaque and it was rededicated July 2003 as Parque Culiacan.

Mr. Al-Oboudi reported that during the December 6, 2005 City Council meeting, a resident of Manhattan Beach requested that the City Council rename the park after Rosa Parks, the famous civil rights leader who recently passed away.

Mr. Al-Oboudi reported that most historians date the beginning of the modern civil rights movement in the United States to December 1, 1955. That was the day when an unknown seamstress in Montgomery, Alabama refused to give up her bus seat to a white passenger. This brave woman, Rosa Parks, was arrested and fined for violating a city ordinance, but her lonely act of defiance began a movement that ended segregation in America and made her an inspiration to freedom-loving people everywhere.

Mr. Al-Oboudi reported that the bus incident led to the formation of the Montgomery Improvement Association, led by the young pastor of the Dexter Avenue Baptist Church, Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr. The association called for a boycott of the city-owned bus company. The boycott lasted 382 days and brought Mrs. Parks, Dr. King and their cause to the attention of the world. A Supreme Court decision struck down the Montgomery ordinance under which Mrs. Parks had been fined and outlawed racial segregation on public transportation.

Mr. Al-Oboudi reported that in 1957, Mrs. Parks and her husband moved to Detroit, Michigan where Mrs. Parks served on the staff of U.S. Representative John Conyers. The Southern Christian Leadership Council established an annual Rosa Parks Freedom Award in her honor. After the death of her husband in 1977, Mrs. Parks founded the Rosa and Raymond Parks Institute for Self-Development. President Clinton presented Rosa Parks with the Presidential Medal of Freedom in 1996. She received a Congressional Gold Medal in 1999.

Mr. Al-Oboudi reported that Mrs. Parks spent her last years living quietly in Detroit, where she died in 2005 at the age of 92. After her death, her casket was placed in the rotunda of the United States Capitol, an honor usually reserved for Presidents of the United States.

Mr. Al-Oboudi reported that because of Mrs. Parks' historical achievements, the City Council requested that the Parks and Recreation Commission discuss and consider the request to rename Parque Culiacan.

AUDIENCE PARTICIPATION

Bob Bohner, President of the Manhattan Beach Sister City Committee, reported that Parque Culiacan was named in honor of our former sister city. Mr. Bohner suggested that even though we have changed our sister city, the park honors the fact that we have reached out to the Sister City program and been a good ambassador to certain towns in Mexico. Mr. Bohner feels very strongly that the parks in Manhattan Beach should have a connection to the history of the city. Approximately two years ago, Leadership Manhattan wanted to change the name of the park and the Sister City Committee opposed the change. A compromise was worked out by the City Council; the park name remained the same and a plaque was placed in the park talking and educating the public about the history of the park. Mr. Bohner suggested that that plaque and the compromise that was reached by the City honors Rosa Parks and the civil rights movement. Mr. Bohner suggested that there is no doubt that Rosa Parks was a great person but we are already honoring her in the context of our own history and should, therefore, not change the name of the park. We would also continue to honor the sister city program by keeping the name on that plaque along with the history of the park.

Bill Roos indicated that he knows the history of the park and purchased his home from the last black family in the area. Mr. Roos suggested that the City of Manhattan Beach shouldn't get so political. The name should stay the same because of the reasons just given by Mr. Bohner. Mr. Roos suggested that the City should not spend \$8-10,000 on a new park sign, indicating that he has been trying for three years to get a shower and drinking fountain on the corner of 26th and the Strand and the City is apparently not willing to spend money.

Patrick McBride indicated that he is familiar with the history of Parque Culiacan, formerly the site of a resort for African Americans named Bruce's Beach; when Rosa Parks died, he thought that the park has a huge civil rights significance and deserves the name of a great civil rights leader. Mr. McBride originally made the request to City Council, indicating that Bob Brigham is in favor of changing the name of Parque Culiacan to Rosa Parks Park; the City Council then directed the Parks and Recreation Commission to discuss and consider the renaming of Parque Culiacan. Mr. McBride suggested that we don't forget about Pearl Harbor and we shouldn't be asked to forget the history of Parque Culiacan.

Marge Crutchfield, active in the Sister City Committee since 1968, indicated that the Sister City program was started by President Eisenhower in 1957 as the People to People project and grew to over 70 countries. The group that the City has dealt with is the US/Mexico group. Ms. Crutchfield reported that the sister city program is all about understanding diversity, appreciating your fellow man no matter what his color is or where he comes from and she suggested that the message on the Parque Culiacan plaque represents all of these things.

Sandra Seville-Jones, 2003 Leadership Manhattan Beach Class co-project manager, reported that the class presented 10 top picks to City Council from over 120 contest entries to rename Parque Culiacan. The City Council decided not to change the name but did approve erecting a new monument sign, allowing a plaque to be placed on the monument that would recognize the origin of the park. Ms. Seville-Jones suggested that the plaque is the Leadership Class's attempt to thematically combine the history of the park with the Sister City ideals; the plaque tries to educate the people on the history of the park. Ms. Seville-Jones reported that the plaque was a gift to the city, paid for with funds raised by the Leadership class. She suggested that the gift should be in the park longer than two years. She would prefer that the name of the park remain the same, but if the City decides to change the name she would like the name to be more in the theme of brotherhood and friendship.

Gail Runk questioned that if the City renames the park, why can't the plaque remain? She suggested that the cost of the sign should not keep the renaming from going forward. She suggested that fundraising could offset the cost of a new sign.

During a discussion among the Commissioners, the following points were made:

- Commissioner Cohen indicated that she was extremely moved by Patrick McBride's presentation regarding the history of Rosa Parks and Bruce's Beach, but also moved by the Sister City program which is honoring diversity. Commissioner Cohen suggested that she has a problem with honoring one set of people over another. She suggested that it is significant that the current sign recognizes the tragic history of blacks and dedicates the park to a better time.
- Commissioner Lear asked whether staff contemplates removing the present monument plaque and replacing it with a new plaque? Mr. Gill reported that it would be the Commission and City Council's decision.
- Commissioner Paralusz inquired about the costs of replacing the sign. Mr. Gill suggested that the plaque would cost approximately \$800 to replace but the \$7-8,000 cost would be for replacing the concrete Parque Culiacan concrete monument sign.
- Commissioner Harris inquired who our current sister city is and why we are no longer sister city with Culiacan. Mr. Bohner reported that our current sister city is Santa Rosa Lia in Baja, California; Ms. Crutchfield reported that Culiacan was our sister city for about thirty years and as time went on the people who were the mainstay in Culiacan either died or politics got into the act and the mayor didn't continue to support the program, so over a period of time the program waned. At that time, around 1989, the Sister City Committee looked for another sister city and found that Santa Rosa Lia was looking for a sister city. The Committee has had many exchanges since that time.

Mr. McBride stated that Bob Brigham suggested that Culiacan was the "drug capitol" of Mexico; however, he doesn't know if that is the reason the name of the sister city was changed.

- Commissioner Lamb inquired whether input has been sought from outside Manhattan Beach, i.e. leaders in the African American community, on how they would react to the renaming of the park to Rosa Parks Park and seek their opinion on how a gesture of this sort would be viewed. Mr. Gill suggested that this is a community issue. He spoke to an African American staff member who suggested that she couldn't see a connection of Rosa Parks with the City but felt Bruce's Beach would be more appropriate.
- Commissioner Lamb asked whether there would be a good reason to seek out input from someone with years of experience in the African American community, i.e. Dr. Murray or Dr. Hudson's associates, on how the African American community might feel if we did rename the park.
- Commissioner Lear asked Mr. McBride if the language on the plaque, to a degree, is what he is trying to accomplish. Mr. McBride suggested that the plaque "doesn't really get to it and doesn't honor Rosa Parks." Commissioner Lear asked whether the text on the plaque, i.e. ...understanding that friendship, goodwill and respect for all begins within our own boundaries...is something Rosa Parks believed in and, therefore, what you are trying to accomplish is done by this text. Mr. McBride didn't agree. He suggested that the name chosen for the park should really reflect the significance of the area.
- Commissioner Lear indicated that he admires Mr. McBride's efforts and suggested that what he is doing is what community is all about, trying to affect change for a noble purpose. Commissioner Lear indicated that it would be important for him that the park's name has some sort of local connection; Culiacan might not be the best name, but the connection of Rosa Parks is not compelling enough to rename the park.
- Commissioner Paralusz thanked everyone who participated this evening. She indicated that she has a great deal of respect for Rosa Parks and everything that she accomplished but she agrees that there is not enough local connection. She suggested that a case could also be made for dedicating the park to Coretta Scott King who also recently passed away and who is also considered a first lady of the civil rights movement in this country. Commissioner Paralusz indicated that she also appreciates the great efforts made by the Sister City Committee and the history behind our relationship with Culiacan and our new sister city. She doesn't agree with naming a park that recognizes the history of one organization to the exclusion of history that preceded it, which was Bruce's Beach. Commissioner Paralusz would personally be in favor of a name more inclusive that recognized our commitment to diversity.
- Commissioner Harris suggested that because Parque Culiacan is the oldest park in Manhattan Beach, the name should be related to Manhattan Beach. She is not in favor of renaming the park Rosa Parks Park but feels that we should explore renaming the park.
- Commissioner Lamb suggested that the current name of the park goes back to 1974; however, the history goes back much further. He suggested that the sister city program is more than naming places to honor sister cities. Commissioner Lamb indicated that Rosa Parks had the courage to stand up to the establishment; he agrees that if the park is to be

renamed, he would favor a name with more of a local connection such as Bruce's Beach to honor the people that were dispossessed in the area.

- Commissioner Gill agreed that if the park is renamed, it needs to teach a history to our community. Bruce's Beach would reflect and tell the story of what actually happened.
- Commissioner Cohen is not in favor of changing the name of the park to Rosa Parks Park because of the lack of local significance. She does respect the Sister City program and its historical context; the only name that would persuade her to change would be Bruce's Beach because it includes both the local history and significant theme.
- Commissioner Lear agrees with other Commissioners and would be open-minded about considering a new park name that has a much more localized connection to our community, i.e. Bruce's Beach. The Commission has an interest in sending the message that Manhattan Beach stands for, amongst other things, diversity and recognizes that the greatest blemish in our history is what happened in the 1920s at Bruce's Beach. He suggested that the plaque that is there now addresses the human issue and he suggested that Mr. McBride's noble effort was to communicate to the world that the City of Manhattan Beach stands for diversity and good will. Commissioner Lear indicated that he is not in favor of renaming the park Rosa Parks Park.
- Commissioner Harris inquired whether Mr. McBride's need is more specific recognition than "friendship and goodwill" and whether there is a vehicle to recognize that in the form of a new plaque.

Mr. McBride suggested that many of the Commissioner's like the name "Bruce's Beach"; he indicated that he, along with Bob Brigham and Jan Dennis, likes the name as well.

Commissioner Lear indicated that the Commission would need direction from City Council to look more broadly at other names.

A motion was made to recommend to City Council that the name of Parque Culiacan not be changed to Rosa Parks Park. (MSC: Lamb/Cohen – Unanimous).

A motion was made to request that the City Council indicate to the Commission whether or not additional input would be desired as to whether Parque Culiacan should be renamed and if so in what direction as to what name. (MSC: Lamb/Gill; Yea: Lamb, Gill, Cohen, Lear, and Paralusz; Abstain: Harris)

REPORTS

Mr. Gill presented the Parks & Recreation Department 2004/2005 Annual Report to the Commission, suggesting that if they had any questions to please call the Department. Mr. Gill suggested one of the biggest accomplishments during the year was installing computer registration. The worst thing that happened during the year was the passing of our Sports Specialist Charlie Saikley.

OTHER COMMISSION BUSINESS

None

ADJOURNMENT

The meeting was adjourned at 8:05 p.m. to the next scheduled meeting on March 27, 2006.

Parks & Recreation Commission

February 27, 2006

Bob Bohner
Bill Russ
Patrick McBride
Marge Crutchfield
Sandra Seville-Jones
Gail Runk