

PARKS AND RECREATION SUBCOMMITTEE REPORT
(Draft consideration only, 6-7-10)

I. INTRODUCTION

A. Subcommittee members: Barbara Harris, Susan Helfrich, Becky Kasha

B. Area of Responsibility: Board of Park Commissioners, Department of Parks and Recreation, Mesker Park Zoo and Botanic Garden, Burdette Park.

II. INFORMATION GATHERED AND REVIEWED

Interviews Conducted:

1. Steve Bohleber, President, Board of Park Commissioners
2. Dan Schall, Director of the Department of Parks and Recreations
3. Steve Craig, Director of Burdette Park
4. Amos Morris, Director of Mesker Park Zoo and Botanic Garden

Research Reviewed:

1. Organization charts for involved offices and departments
2. AZA recommendations for governance of zoos and aquariums
3. The plans of the 1990 and 2005 reorganization committees and supporting documents

III. CURRENT SITUATION

1. **The Board of Park Commissioners (BPC)** oversees the Department of Parks and Recreation and Mesker Park Zoo and Botanic Gardens (MPZBG). The BPC is an independent policy-making body which establishes policies, makes financial allocations and approves special projects. The BPC consists of five members who serve four-year terms. The Board is composed via a bi-partisan appointment process. Because the taxing district includes all of Vanderburgh County, three members are appointed by the Mayor of Evansville and two are appointed by the Vanderburgh County Commissioners.
2. **The Department of Parks and Recreation (DPR)** coordinates and oversees the operation of 65 parks and 21 special facilities encompassing more than 2,300 acres of land in the City of Evansville and Vanderburgh County, Indiana. The DPR oversees adult sports programming, three golf courses and a par 3 golf course, Goebel Soccer Complex, Swonder Ice Arena, and the municipal pools and swimming related programming. In addition, it is responsible for park planning in conjunction with various neighborhood associations and the Greenway Advisory Board, and it manages several facilities under contract such as the Carver Community Center and the Boys and Girls Club. DPR also maintains 50+ boulevards.

3. **MPZBG**, while operating under the auspices of the BPC, also has an advisory board who sends recommendations and reports to the Board of Park Commissioners. The MZPBG Advisory Board is composed of the following annual appointees: four are appointed by the Mayor and one is appointed by City Council; one of the Mayor's appointees shall be a member of the BPC. The Director of MPZBG is a department head who reports directly to the mayor.
4. **Burdette Park** is the only "park" in Vanderburgh County that is not under the auspices of the BPC and the Department of Parks and Recreation. The Director of Burdette Park reports directly to the County Commissioners.

Of primary concern was the continued growth and prosperity of Burdette Park and MPZBG, both of which are very popular and have the potential to be engines for economic growth in the community. Continued maintenance and improvement of existing parks was a higher priority than the construction of new parks given the anticipated contraction of revenue within local government. The subcommittee wanted to increase efficiencies and facilitate the sharing of expertise and knowledge where possible.

5. **Urban Forestry:** The Evansville Department of Urban Forestry is currently under the Department of Transportation and Services, and consists of four full time tree crew workers, and is managed by the Evansville City Arborist. The Department of Urban Forestry is responsible for Enforcement of the Evansville Tree Ordinance, supervision of the Arborist Licensing program, inspection and recommendations for public tree issues, dissemination and review of public tree planting and removal permits, hazardous tree and tree limb removal, removal of tree debris created by storms, inventory of existing public trees, educational programs.
6. **Contractual Facility Operations:** The Evansville Vanderburgh County Building Authority (EVCBA) previously assumed the maintenance and management of the Victory Theater, Roberts Stadium, Mesker Amphitheater, and the new Arena, from SMG and the Parks Department. There is a similar arrangement with EVCBA for the Centre. SMG has retained to operate and promote the facilities. (In this situation, operate means SMG books and promotes event. The Building Authority manage the physical facilities.)
7. **Wesselman Woods Nature Preserve:** The Wesselman Nature Society, a 501(c)(3) organization, is responsible for the management and daily operations of Wesselman Woods Nature Preserve, as well as Howell Wetlands. Working in partnership with the City of Evansville, they present environmental education programs and outdoor recreation.

IV. PROPOSAL FOR UNIFICATION:

1. **BPC:** The structure of this board remains intact and retains all of its current duties.
2. **DPR:** This department remains intact, retains all of its current duties, and will continue to operate under the authority of the BPC. A proposed organization chart will be prepared and included.
3. **MPZBG:** MPZBG is not a “park” in the traditional sense. It is business, and thus has unique issues that do not exist “parks”. Accordingly, it requires the expertise and advocacy provided by an advisory board. Moreover, MPZBG is enjoying a renaissance under its current structure, and is looking to transition into a public/private business model similar to that utilized by roughly 70% of accredited zoos in the United States. In light of the foregoing, bringing the Zoo under the supervision of the Parks Department, as some have suggested, or otherwise altering the organization model would not be beneficial at this time. Thus, the organizational, supervisory reporting, and Advisory Board structures for MPZBG will remain in place.
4. **Burdette Park:** Burdette Park also is not a traditional park. It is a unique and successful business. Thus, it should have a high level organizational structure, supervisory reporting structure, and Advisory Board structure, similar to that of MPZBG.
5. **Urban Forestry:** The Subcommittee asks the DPR and the Department of Transportation and Services to examine the position of Urban Forestry within the organizational structure of unified government. Perhaps it would be better suited under the DPR.
6. **Contractual Facility Operations:** No changes are suggested.
7. **Wesselman Woods Nature Preserve:** No changes are suggested.