

Bloomington Arts Commission
Minutes
November 8th, 2017

Present: Abby Henkel, Alain Barker, Peter Jacobi, Martina Celerin, Emily Goodson, Sally Gaskill, Lynn Schwartzberg, Sean Starowitz, Katie Skayhan, Angelo Pizzo, Michael Wilkerson, person from public, red velvet cupcakes, Nick Carter, interested Spicewood resident.

News Flash: For the first time in a year, yr secretary arrived early and had the rare pleasure of seeing Chair Sally Gaskill be one of the last ones present, though she still ruthlessly gaveled the commission to order snap-doodle on the spot at 5 p.m.

There was a new seating arrangement in the room. Some suspected that perhaps IU intern Katie Skayhan had done this to make her own presence less conspicuous and therefore less likely to be assigned busy work.

It has worked for her in school, so why not?

Dave Williams, operations director of the Parks and Recreation Dept, was our special guest, here to provide a detailed overview of plans for the new Switchyard Park, where once up to 700 rail cars were stored waiting to be filled with made-by-RCA TV's to be taken worldwide. Now the B-line trail bisects the area, but otherwise it is a forlorn, windy and sometimes swampy passage, full of scraggly immature trees, discreet piles of coal ash from the industrial era, and plastic Kroger bags rolling through like tumbleweeds in the wind.

In the late 1990's, after the RCA plant closed, CSX rail company declared the railyard surplus ... the City acquired a rail line that became the B-line trail.

The remaining 27-28 acres of switchyard was expensive. Capitalism sucks! But then City acquired it finally in 2005, along with bought 7 acres of property west of Rogers. (This will be the west entrance to the park.) There will also be an entrance off of Grimes Lane, and another at the old Wee Willies Restaurant on Walnut. Total park: 57 acres. (Bryan Park is 32 acres, Twin Lakes is 50 acres.)

Secretary wondered: which is more polluted: the grease deposits from the beloved but not oil-shy former diner, or the coal ash from a hundred years of heavy industry? It would be a close call, he thinks.)

Night Moves, though purchased by the City is not part of the park itself. This, after all, will be a family-friendly park, so the city is looking at other development properties for that site. (Suggestion for elimination from consideration: student apartments.)

"People come where people are." That's the goal of the project, to make the park vibrant so that people will come in large numbers, and stay for relatively long periods of time.

The current plan includes lawns, revenue producing facility and related properties, a dog park, etc. (Is this discrimination against cats? Must check with legal.)

Most of the land is in a flood plain. Several feet of coal ash deposited there. Property is a blank slate...waiting for both environmental remediation and activation.

(You could eat the coal ash but it doesn't taste very good, Katie Skayhan. We don't care if you are on a student budget. They are going to cover it over to reduce the temptation.)

"The platform" off Rogers – pavilion of 11000 square feet, open air and climate controlled...possible home of winter farmers market...performance lawn...industrial feel of weathered steel, limestone mill blocks, etc. This will be the main attraction of the park, a focal point near the entrance.

Dave Williams sure knows a Lot about sediment and such...the upshot of which is that the city is going to uncover a buried stream, which will make what is now a forlorn, Bergmanesque zone of the park downright cute.

Plus, if you're into watersports, the park includes a "splash pad." Why not a pool? Thought the secretary. Alas, there's not enough \$ for a pool, plus, unlike the abandoned hulks at Mills and Bryan, the splash pad can be used for dry activities in seasons other than summer.

There will be a big fancy playground as a centerpiece of the park. Mr. Williams noted that the ragin' playground that was added to Cascades a few years ago has really pepped up that beautiful but once underutilized park. So a good bet for the other end of town, thinks the city.

Will this structure be useful for adults? Or are most Commissioners, save Emily and Abby, perhaps too old for this?

(There will be porch swings and lots of seats for us senior citizens.)

Surveillance cameras will be everywhere. Clean it up, Abby! You too, Alain! You can't hide forever, Katie Skayhan!

(We interrupt these minutes to praise the oft-maligned and always-misspelled Lynn Schwartzberg, who not only stood up fiercely for art and artists during these discussion, but who also brought the most outrageously delicious red velvet cupcakes and *set them right next to yr secretary, whose* attempt to refrain for once in deference to what seems to be a bit of winter weight gain, of course, at about this point of the meeting, failed. Yes, people. I did inhale. Thank you, Lynn/e. You are a Hero of the People.)

The city is moving into new areas. There will not be an area for pickling vegetables, this not being Portlandia, but there will be Pickleball courts instead of tennis courts. Pickleball is a sport that can't decide whether it is squash or tennis or ping-pong; consequently no one is any good

at it, which makes it democratic and unthreatening, hence surging in popularity like craft beer and excessively long beards.

The city is also adding bocce courts, in hopes of luring retired Italians (friends of Sally's husband?) to Bloomington. (Seriously, yr secretary can vouch for bocce as the bafflingly preferred sport of graduate students at American University, where he previously worked, and so is confident that this hip flask-based multicultural endeavor will prove quite popular in Bloomington.)

There will also be community gardens. Ash grows a really good tomato!

This Pavilion is going to be totally environmental. Watering the gardens with storm water, solar panels, LEED silver status. Based on my professional opinion, it looks cool.

How much to rent? Don't ask. You can't afford it. Sorry, Angelo Pizzo. But thank you for asking. (Actually rates have not yet been set; they will be determined, as was the case with the Buskirk-Chumley, by how loudly community organizations scream once suggested rates are revealed.)

There will be an outdoor stage and the ability to bring in the mobile stage. Could have a 4.5 acre Woodstock festival right there! Can fit the Bloomington Symphony Orchestra on the stage. Can the BSO play Purple Haze, and will thousands of people come? Yes and yes. Someone – Alain, predictably – asked about the acoustics. Ahem, it's outdoors. But seriously, the architects are consulting with a sound specialist.

Would the Doobie Brothers come to town? That was a dream someone had. I mean, Elvis did once. The answer, though, is Probably not. But that's okay! Most commissioners greatly relieved!

Is this the Bloomington Pavers Commission? Where the park is neither grassy or ashy, it will be paved. Lots of paver talk. But these new miracle stones are porous yet durable, letting the water drain to wherever John Fernandez put all those drains years ago when he maniacally dug up half the city one winter. So we are pro-paver.

They're going to add a skate park and a dog park. A missed opportunity for innovation there – what about a skating dog park? Roller skating dogs? A playground for grandparents? Do grandparents like slides?

(Yr secretary beginning to question the sugar content of the red cupcakes. Or perhaps it's the red dye #2 for which Lynn(e) is so well known.

There will be an obstacle course for dogs. Why is everything an obstacle in this world today?

The park will have wi-fi so that no one can get away from their job. That means that if yr secretary brings his class there, they would still spend much of it on Facebook, with fresher air and more pavers.

There will be a “bosque” with sort of mature trees and a lot of different seating arrangements. Including a weird, grass-covered lounge thing that looks like the back of a dinosaur. Commissioners liked this one, even though half dived to their phones and Wikipedia to look up that word. You got us on that one, Dave Williams!

Everything is designed to get you to stop and hang out for longer....it makes the park safer...that’s the plus of wifi, of course.

Timeline: Award a contract for building by May of 18, finish mostly by December 2019, Total Completion Spring of 2020.

The city is paying \$25-30 million for this beauty. This time, having learned the hard lessons of life in many years at the City, Dave Williams set a goal: get this done in one swoop rather than as a “multi-phase” project. Because the second phase sometimes just doesn’t arrive.

We thanked Mr. Williams for his presentation and then we began to object to the lack of artistic involvement in the planning and to the disappointment of only getting about \$40,000 for the percent for art fund because the 1% applies just to the structures and not to the total project cost. Sally would have liked to have seen this presentation two years ago.

It turns out that Miah Michaelsen was involved in the very early stages of this planning, but the BAC role kind of got lost after she left the City. Though the current plan is complete, Mr. Williams pointed out two areas of the park that could include cool new stuff but that are not designed as yet, though whatever is put there will have to come from new money from somewhere else.

We all looked at Martina, our treasurer. She shrugged. I mean, she has some money, but not *that* kind of money.

The presentation included a mock-up of a mural on the wall of the splash pad changing room, as possible use of the percent for art dollars.

Lynn: We’re back to thinking about public art as a static thing on a wall. She mentioned a park in Cincinnati where people interact with the art, make some music, etc., and urged the city to do something similar in this park.

Alain suggested a partnership with Rotary to work with city on this.

Martina – we need more creativity, more art. A big giant piece is lovely, but art could be woven through the park much more.

Abby commented that the entire Switchyard Park project seems like a public art piece and is artistic throughout.

Generally, there was much unhappiness that the art would have to come later – sometimes that seems too common to all of us. It's always "later." We agreed informally to look into ways to make the park more artistic from this point forward.

Dave Williams assured us that the architecture firm they are using is very creative. Rundell, Ernstberger is the group. Pricey but cool.

Sally pointed out that interactive art is a draw of people and that gets people into a park. Which is the city's stated goal. Thus, Arts are not "just another constituency" like the war memorial crowd and others who also didn't get what they wanted in the park.

Sean: Maybe the BAC could find ways to use its program money.

Martina: even the fencing could be artistic in design....

Williams: I hear what you're saying that art can keep people in the place...

Gabe: This is the clearest vision of this project I've seen presented.

Williams: The vision is for one continuous trail/park that will expand the downtown both to the south and the north, from Country Club Drive to Lake Griffy.

We all thanked Dave Williams, who then vanished.

We are still in need of a new commissioner. No real progress, need word from Mayor.

We discussed the Final Report from DNA, the BCT startup people. Abby read it. Loved it. Success. (This is Va Va Vaudeville.)

October minutes were approved with only one no vote. Katie Skayhan is non-voting, but in her heart, she was a No.

Treasurer's Report: We spent \$147 on a reception. But we are holding onto the rest.

Sean mentioned the Pledge of Allegiance project. We are the only city involved in this national collaboration with Creative Time.

He attended the city council for discussion of master plan, at which Susan Sandberg and Allison Chopra said they were interested in an increase in the grant program next year and/or an

“inflation increase” once every 3 years. Sean is hoping for 40K next year. Kudos to Gabe Gloden of Cardinal Stage for coming to council and speaking about the grant program.

Katie Skayhan has been putting stuff on the new website as if it’s real. It looks good and apparently no one is going to stop her. Gabe Colman praised it in its new incarnation. She is also working on a BEAD web redesign, with all deliberate speed.

Sean is going to spiff up the 2008-era branding materials on BEAD.

There have been about 50 responses to the BEAD grant survey. Joanna Woronkowitz, consultant, will be interviewing 4 commissioners and city council/mayor.

Lynn was surprised at the limited scope of the survey. Wanted more facets to it. Might it be too limited, or is it a decent start toward getting the information we need? We will discuss anon.

Bicentennial Project: Katie has been talking to the American Composers Forum for info on best practices, etc. More soon. Some people think it should be a contest. We are fighting the perception in some circles that someone has already been picked.

Katie Skayhan is heroically battling against that and for the legitimacy of Bloomington.

The RFQ will go out as soon as we figure out what we are doing/exactly what we want.

Sean showed this cool stuff that will spiff up the fence at the Graduate Hotel construction site on Kirkwood. It looks artistic! (and is, your secretary notes weeks later)

But it’s very expensive. Gabe suggested that we could make fences with local art images on them. The reaction seemed to indicate that, um, maybe it’s not *that* expensive in its current form. But it bears looking into as there will be umpty-zillion more construction projects in the city and cool artistic fence would be distinctive. Keep Bloomington not-Greenwood, as they say.

Various announcements were made about interesting upcoming events involving commissioners and/or their organizations – active bunch!

Emily raised the issue of the discussion we had a few months ago about the Peoples Park situation. She liked the new mural in Peoples Park but the “you belong here” tagline was a bit tone deaf. Yr secretary concurs.

She is concerned that it was a bit of an attack on the people who, since our discussion with Councilperson Sandberg, no longer occupy the park. Apparently they don’t belong there, is the implication. Emily raised the concern that solving social problems and enhancing artistic presence does not have to mean, nor should it mean, displacement.

It was suggested that we revisit this larger issue at a later date.

Peter Jacobi will be given a Lifetime Achievement Award on Friday, November 10 at the Waldron. Congratulations, Peter – so well deserved!

The cupcake stains were visible on the table, but only in a certain light, so at that point, it being 6:30, the meeting was adjourned and the Commission fled, leaving Katie Skayhan to ponder what it all means.

M Wilkerson
Secretary