

NOVA Parks

Board Meeting, January 16, 2025

7:30 p.m.

NOVA Parks Headquarters

5400 Ox Road

Fairfax Station, VA 22039

MINUTES

ATTENDANCE:

Board members

In attendance:

Sean Kumar, Chairman

Paul Baldino, Vice Chairman

James Bonfils

Mark Chandler

Dave Gustafson

Douglas Stewart

Paul Ferguson

Michael Nardolilli

Scott Price joined via Zoom

Patricia Harrison *joined at 7:36*

Absent:

Cate Magennis Wyatt

Stella Koch

Staff:

Paul Gilbert, Executive Director

Chris Pauley, Director of Operations

Lauren Weaver, Director of Finance

Brian Nolan, Director of Planning and Development

Blythe Russian Park Operations Superintendent

Danielle Endler, HR Administrator

Adam Melton, Information Technology Administrator

John Bell, Senior Planner

Mike DePue, Planning Administrator

Kevin Casalenuovo, Park Operations Superintendent

Patrick Wells, Budget Administrator

Leslie Preble, Planning and Development Administrative Assistant

Kelly Gilfillen, Marketing and Communications Director via Zoom

Guests

Michael Lupton, Robinson, Farmer, Cox Associates

OPEN SESSION

CALL TO ORDER

The Chairman called the meeting to order at 7:30

APPROVAL OF MINUTES

A Motion was made by Mr. Bonfil and seconded by Mr. Ferguson to approve the November 21, 2024, Board Meeting minutes.

8 voted to approve, Mr. Nardolilli abstained

TREASURER'S REPORT/STATUS OF FUNDS

Mr. Bonfils gave a brief review of the Treasurer's report.

BOARD ELECTIONS

Mr. Ferguson of the Nominating committee spoke and reminded the board that the terms are typically 3 years in length and that we are at 2 of 3 years now. He said he spoke with and supports the current members of the executive committee to continue to serve.

Mr. Ferguson nominated and Mr. Bonfil seconded Mr. Sean Kumar for Chairman
Unanimously approved

Mr. Gustafson nominated, and Mr. Nardolilli seconded Mr. Baldino as Vice Chairman
Unanimously approved

Mr. Ferguson nominated, and Mr. Stewart seconded Mr. Bonfils as treasurer
Unanimously approved

Mr. Ferguson nominated, and Mr. Stewart seconded Patricia Harrison as Member At Large
Unanimously approved

AUDITOR'S REPORT

Michael Lupton, Robinson, Farmer, Cox Associates

Michael Lupton, Robinson, Farmer, Cox, Associates gave an analysis of the FY24 Audit. Mr. Lupton issued an audit opinion that the ACFR Report for FY24 was an unmodified, and clean opinion.

He noted that they did issue a memorandum for potential improvements regarding license agreements

Lauren Weaver, Director of Finance, discussed the response letter written in conjunction with Brian Nolan, Director of Planning and Development. Ms. Weaver said that Planning will start using the lease software that the Finance department has been using to manage lease deadlines. The software will help to remind staff well in advance of any possible renegotiations of leases. She also said that Planning and Finance will meet quarterly so that finance can be notified of any updates or changes.

IT AUDIT AND RESPONSE

Adam Melton, Information Technology Administrator

Mr. Melton explained process of meeting with the auditors.

The first security recommendation from auditors is to expand MFA (multi-factor authentication) to all systems where supported and increase security measures where MFA cannot be enabled. Mr. Melton explained that we have MFA on all most used critical systems. The Information Technology department will identify and expand where else MFA is needed.

The second recommendation is in contingency planning and disaster recovery. The auditors recommend that a formal recovery test utilizing existing backup procedures be developed. Mr. Melton said that they are working to develop a formal DR test schedule.

Mr. Bonfils spoke about the auditors and informed the board that there will be a bid process to consider other auditors.

Ms. Weaver explained that there will be a normal bid process for auditors and that Robinson, Farmer, Cox is expected to bid but others likely will as well

Mr. Baldino asked if there's any reason to select another auditor.

Ms. Weaver again said they'll go through the bid process, but she sees no reason to exclude from Robinson, Farmer, Cox from bidding.

Mr. Baldino asked if we should change auditors regularly.

Ms. Weaver voiced her opinion to say that the current thinking is for an organization to stay with auditors. Auditors learn and can give better feedback the longer they work with an organization. However, she said that ultimately it will be for the board to decide. She also added that nothing was lost when we switched partners (different office) because they had all the access and documents.

REPORT ON ALL THREE LIGHT SHOWS

Bull Run Festival of Lights

Chris Pauley, Director of Operations

Mr. Pauley introduced Kevin Casalenuovo as the new Parks Operations Superintendent, replacing Mark Whaley who retired earlier this month.

Mr. Gilbert then re-introduced Patrick Wells as the new Budget Administrator.

Mr. Pauley explained that Bull Run Festival of Lights ran for 52 days this year. They continue to make improvements of holiday village by offering more nights. The camel rides vendor expanded operations with more animals indoors and that was very popular. The park had 3,300 cars on busiest night. The goal for online ticket sales is 70% of ticket sales, with the incentive that tickets are less expensive online. Actual online sales were at 67% this year over 60% last year. No weather closures. 2nd highest vehicle total ever.

Mr. Kumar asked about traffic time waiting to get in. Mr. Pauley explained that they have added a lane and put the ticket booths deeper into the park and that has eased the traffic congestion.

Blythe Russian, Park Operations Superintendent
Meadowlark Winter Walk and Cameron Run Ice & Lights

Ms. Russian discussed how Meadowlark Winter Walk of Lights works with Eventbrite for timed ticket sales. She explained that customers can also “follow” the park on Eventbrite, which is a helpful indicator of how many people are interested in the event. Eventbrite is selling over 90% of tickets online. She also said that Winter Walk of Lights has an 87% recommendation rate on Eventbrite. There are convenience fees through Eventbrite, and it has been negotiated to get a portion of those fees back.

Ms. Russian also discussed the Marketing Communications plan including specific commercials for podcasts and a partnership with iHeart. Additionally, social media influencers came to the shows and made videos and posted photos. Bilingual ads also helped to reach more of the population in the area. There were even live broadcasts on the local news.

Meadowlark operated 59 days this season with zero closures. However, there were 10 nights of rain (double last year) and 7 nights temps below 30 degrees. To help bring more customers in lower rates were offered for off peak nights at the beginning of the light show season.

Ms. Russian also mentioned that the Winter Walk of Lights helps the Atrium at Meadowlark. They had many holiday parties and weddings because of the lights.

Cameron Run Ice & Lights

This was the 6th year of Ice and Lights. This truly makes Cameron Run a year-round park. They are trying to figure out the best timing of ice rink, etc. More daytime skating hours were added through December, and it is still open on weekends through February, including a Valentine’s Day skating event.

The park had 5 days of closure for both the rink and village. At least an additional 5 or more ice rink closures but with the village open. The ice rink had more closures this year than last.

UPDATE ON DISCUSSIONS WITH DOMINION ON VEGETATION
Paul Gilbert, Executive Director:

Mr. Gilbert explained that Dominion is clearing every tree that has the potential to grow 10 feet on a 4-mile path from Vienna to Dunn Loring.

In the meeting he attended with Dominion last week, Dominion indicated no plan for replanting, and they are rejecting the 2005 MOU. He said he proposed pollinator restoration with native grasses wildflowers shrubs with additional money to keep the invasives from taking hold. Dominion rejected the plan said they don't want to fund long-term efforts. Instead, they offered NOVA Parks a one-time \$50K donation to address the issue. Dominion also said in the meeting that next year they would do the same thing in Reston. Mr. Gilbert said this indicates that the cutting will not be a one-time, he expects that they will cut many more areas along the park.

Next steps – going out with dominion staff looking foot by foot to evaluate.

Mr. Price stepped away for this portion per Sean Kumar

Mr. Nardolilli asked if the jurisdictions have any power in this and John Bell discussed possible policies like storm water/erosion controls but wasn't sure if Dominion might be exempt with their easements.

Motion by Mr. Ferguson and Mr. Chandler seconded for a letter to be sent from the Chairman to the General Assembly members representing areas of the trail.

9 voted to approve, Mr. Price abstained

ADMIN ITEMS

Award of Contract - Wizard Works for fabrication and delivery of water play feature at Algonkian Volcano Island Waterpark

Award of Construction Contract for Pohick Campground Waterline construction

Motion by Mr. Nardolilli and seconded by Mr. Baldino to approve administrative items.

Unanimously approved

Mr. Gilbert took a moment to make the Board aware of an event on February 5 at 2pm at Meadowlark in honor of Black History Month. He then shared a brief overview of the story of Caroline Ware and her early attempt to take down Jim Crow laws.

Motion by Mr. Nardolilli and Mr. Gustafson seconded that the Board move into closed session.

Unanimously approved

Moved into closed session at: 9:40

CLOSED SESSION

Motion by Mr. Nardolilli and Mr. Bonfils seconded that the Board move out of closed session.

Unanimously approved

Moved out of closed session at: 9:53

The Chairman read:

I certify that, to the best of my knowledge, only public business matters lawfully exempted from open meeting requirements prescribed by the Virginia Freedom of Information Act and only such matters identified in the motion to convene closed session were heard, discussed, or considered by this Board during Closed Session.

Roll call vote: all in favor

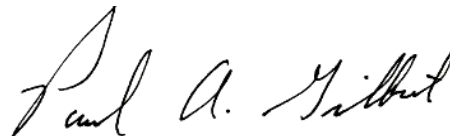
OPEN SESSION

ADJOURNMENT

Mr. Stewart moved to adjourn the meeting and Mr. Baldino seconded the motion.

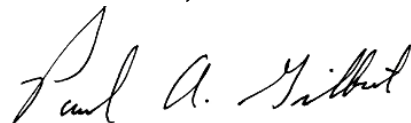
Board Meeting Adjourned at 9:55

Respectfully submitted,



Paul A. Gilbert, Secretary

Approved by the NOVA Parks Authority Board
On March 20, 2025



Paul A. Gilbert, Secretary



Sean Kumar, Chairman

