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Nov / Dec - 2020



Monthly Insight into the Elizabeth Park & Rec District

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Proposed 2021 District Budget

The Board of Directors is close to adopting the 2021 annual budget after months of planning, discussions, and reviews. The budget includes funding for an additional FT Park Technician, continuation of funding for the Transplanting the Pines program, and revenue increases as a result of sign-advertising, tree sales, and expanded park/facility permitting operations.

General Fund revenues are budgeted to total \$843,204 and expenses are proposed at \$646,528. Within the Enterprise Fund, revenues are proposed of \$406,810 and expenses of \$250,878.

The District has completed some significant capital improvements over the last few years including the splashpad and a property purchase while maintaining strong fiscal health. As such, the Board has approved additional significant capital improvements for 2021.

The budget hearing will be held on December 8th at 7pm at the Casey Jones Pavilion.

2020 in Review

- A Year of Preparing and Planning for Improvements -

As the world was upended by the Covid-19 pandemic for most the entirety of 2020 and we all continue to face a number of unprecedented challenges, the District accomplished a historic long-term goal. Through purchasing new property, the District has expanded Casey Jones Park to over 100-acres. This expansion allows for expanded park and recreation amenities while being able to preserve a large area of wooded natural open space for generations of Elizabeth residents to enjoy.

Upon purchasing the property, the District assembled a group of community and park stakeholders which created a vision for how the park should be improved. This vision includes renovating the rodeo / event arena and adding equestrian amenities, building a field house, expanding the campground, allocation of space for a proposed Homestead Education Center, adding an event shelter, developing a dog park, adding a ballfield, and allocating space for a future community recreation center near the corner of 86 and 17. The Board of Directors has recently accepted the vision for improving the park and through its 2021 budget, will be funding some of those improvements.

While the last year was perfectly suitable for tasks such as visioning and planning, it was not so suitable for District programming and events. Though we were able to complete the youth basketball season in early March, spring programs were cancelled completely as things shut down. We were able to offer some very limited youth softball and baseball programming in lieu of our regular leagues by Summer, and adult softball was played, though for the most part, we really were not able to offer the programs and events that make Summer so fun. We did get our fall youth sports seasons in, albeit in a modified manner in some instances, though our youth Winter basketball program is now cancelled as pandemic conditions continue to worsen. Our annual Caroling with Santa event in December is also being cancelled this year unfortunately.

As we prepare for the holidays, anticipate coming vaccines that will help manage the pandemic, and look forward to 2021 (or at least an exit from 2020), we thank you for your continued support through an extremely challenging year. We look forward to serving you in 2021.

Planned 2021 Capital Improvements

In 2017, voters within the District approved a ballot initiative that allowed for the continued collection of an expiring mill levy after the District paid off its debt obligation for the construction of Evans Park. The continued collection of this mill levy enables the District to pursue and fund capital projects that improve your park and recreation system. Capital projects over the last three years that have been completed include the installation of the splashpad, the purchase of 91-acres surrounding Casey Jones Park, the purchase of maintenance equipment, the automation of pump and irrigation controls, and the addition of a half-pipe to the skatepark.

At its November meeting, the Board of Directors reviewed and preliminarily approved a very robust budget for capital improvements in 2021 and intends to speed up the pace of improving and expanding your park and recreation resources. With an allocation of over \$800K being made for 2021, District staff are going to have their hands full trying to manage a variety of exciting projects.

The most costly improvement for 2021 will be a proposed expansion of the campground. A significant revenue stream for the District, the campground is operated near capacity year-round and this is an investment that will pay for itself in relatively short order, while providing the District with an increased revenue stream to help fund other park system improvements. The plan calls for adding 7-10 full hook-up RV sites as well as 3-4 yurt or cabin type structures in an area to the east of the rodeo arena.

Another project that will enhance Casey Jones Park and yield additional revenue to the District is the construction of an event shelter in the Prairie Lawn near the Casey Jones Pavilion. This 60' by 30' structure will provide existing and new event organizers with needed covered space in a beautiful setting amongst the pines. The event shelter will enhance the annual Celtic Festival and the Elbert County Market Place, while attracting new events and functions to be held in the park. When combined with the adjacent Casey Jones Pavilion, the event shelter will offer a unique indoor/outdoor venue experience that can serve groups of 200 or more attendees.

Other planned capital expenditures for Casey Jones Park in 2021 include fencing replacement, installation of a dog park, and design and engineering services related to park development and a proposed future recreation center.

At Evans Park, the capital improvement budget will fund the completion of a sidewalk / trail connection from the new town trail to existing park walkways. Other expenditures include a new District maintenance vehicle, the installation of a full outdoor basketball court, and the District's annual payment for the property purchased around Casey Jones Park.



Quote of the Month

Life is like riding a bicycle. To keep your balance, you must keep moving.

-Albert Einstein -

Message from the Director

Just Be Kind – It Really Does Matter

As the Holiday Season is upon us, and there seems to be so many critical factors in our society causing fear, division, anxiety, and frustration, my hope is that each of us can just commit to being kind. I hope we remember that we all share much more in common than we differ on, and that it is our commonalities that form the bonds between us as members of our community.

Regardless of who we voted for, whether we choose to wear a mask or not, or our thoughts on the preferred rate of growth in the Elizabeth Community, we all can and should focus on being kind to each other. Does that good feeling of holding the door open for a stranger disappear if you knew that person voted differently than you? Of course not. Kindness breaks down barriers, it opens people's hearts, and whether giving or receiving, you and those around you benefit.

Kindness is not always easy, and it may appear as too simplistic a gesture to meaningfully impact our lives in a positive way, though please be assured, it really does matter. I sincerely hope for a happy holiday season for you and your family.