

Recommendations for Elkins Parks & Recreation Organization and Oversight from the Parks and Recreation Committee:

These recommendations are based on a loose survey of the operations of other parks and recreation departments and committees in Northwest Arkansas, as well as the current governing ordinance for Parks and Recreation, Ordinance 06-20-2019A and the ordinance that established the funding for the Sports Complex, Ordinance 03-20-2014A.

Recommendation #1: Creation of a single employee Parks and Recreation Department with its own budget. The department could report directly to the Mayor or act as a sub-department of Streets. Creation of a Parks and Recreation Department allows for a unified plan for Recreational facilities and programs in Elkins, including current youth baseball and softball, as well as future expansion into adult baseball, softball, and kickball, youth and adult soccer and sand volleyball, community events, and other future programs. *The kinds of large-scale improvements in facilities and expansion of programming that are needed in our city require a multi-year budgeting and planning process, which opens up the possibility for grant-matching capabilities and other longer-term strategic financial planning.*

Current funding that could be earmarked for an initial Parks and Recreation Budget:

- **Funds from Pavilion & RV Rentals at Bunch Park**
- **Funds from expanded recreational programming made possible by the Parks and Recreation employee, league volunteers, and committee volunteers**
- **Funds from various community events held at Bunch Park, including concession stand income and/or rental fees for booths, vendors, etc. made possible by the Parks and Recreation employee and community volunteers**

Recommendation #2: Follow the current Committee organization as set forth in Ordinance 06-20-2019A. The only improvement that the committee would suggest is that in filling out the membership of the committee, every effort should be taken to make sure the committee consists of members from all areas of parks and recreation interests in the community, including recreational sports, recreational trails for walking, jogging, and cycling, playground equipment and other amenities, and community events. Currently, the committee recommends adding at least one member to represent the interests of youth baseball and softball and at least one member to represent the interests of soccer and other sports.

Concerning Budgeting: The committee should meet at least quarterly and work with the Parks and Recreation Director **to develop an opening budget to be submitted to the Council each year as well as recommend priorities for capital improvements and means for financing the same and shall prepare an annual progress report on the various parks and recreation activities.** These are some of the responsibilities of the committee set forth in the current governing ordinance that was passed in 2019 that we are currently unable to fulfill without a designated budget and staff member. Note: The vast majority of cities in Northwest Arkansas have a single parks and recreation advisory committee that works in this capacity.

Concerning Oversight: The current ordinance created the Parks and Recreation Committee as an advisory committee for parks **and recreation**. It calls on the committee to : “Adopt such rules and regulations as are necessary for the conduct of business at their meetings and **concerning use, enjoyment of city owned/operated park and recreation facilities**; and to “Hold public hearings or otherwise solicit public input on plans and proposals as may be prudent”. By not following the rules outlined in this ordinance, we have not been providing our residents with an appropriate channel through which to address concerns and suggestions as it relates to our recreational facilities and programs. Having one committee that has oversight on all aspects of Parks and Recreation working with a Parks and Recreation Director provides the needed opportunity for residents to be involved in oversight and development of all recreation in our city.

Recommendation #3: In addition to the Parks and Recreation Committee, the Parks Director and the representatives of the various leagues interested in using Elkins parks and recreational facilities for organized recreational activities, should develop a contract to be presented to the City Council that outlines obligations of both the city and the league representatives for the use of the associated fields during the league season. This can be accomplished in a number of ways. In Springdale, most recreational activities are handled by Parks and Recreation Staff, with the exception of some of the older youth baseball leagues. In Fayetteville, all are handled by parks and recreation staff with the exception of youth baseball, which is organized and managed by the Fayetteville Youth Baseball organization. In Siloam Springs, youth baseball, softball, and soccer all have separate contracts dictating who is responsible for what during the course of their season. But in all of the area cities that were looked at, the fields reverted to city stewardship when not under contract with the associated league, allowing them to make them available to the public in some form or fashion.

Recommendation #4: Implement a plan to make the Sports Complex a functional City Park by expanding programming and access. The Sports Complex, a facility which cost approximately \$2 million, was funded by Ordinance 03-20-2014A as “recreational facilities for its citizens”, but is currently only available to a very small subset of residents for a small segment of the year. Both facility access and recreational programming need to be expanded to allow for better access for more of our residents. With the current field set-up, recreational programming could easily be expanded to include:

- Fall Youth Baseball & Softball
- Spring & Fall Adult Baseball, Softball, and/or Kickball
- Youth Summer Camps
- When not reserved for use in league play, fields could be available for use by teams and other larger groups on a reservation basis, and/or 1 or 2 fields could be made available for individual recreational play during daytime hours. Other area cities use security cameras to avoid and or prosecute for vandalism. Additionally, expanding the offerings available at the Sports Complex means more people at the facility who are invested in the care and upkeep of the facility. Restrooms could be available at peak use times and during organized events. **These are examples of the types of issues that the Parks and Recreation Committee should be a clearing house for, and should be working to develop suggested rules and regulations for, to be presented to the City**

Council after gathering comments from residents at public meetings and with additional inputs from other tools, such as community surveys.

With minimal costs, these additional recreational programs could be implemented at Bunch Park:

- Adult Co-ed Sand Volleyball
- First Touch Soccer for 3-4 year olds
- Private & Group Tennis Lessons

This is why we need a single Parks and Recreation Advisory Committee. Organized recreational programming can and should be happening at both of our recreational facilities and all should be overseen by a Parks and Recreation Director.

Operation as a public park would allow for access to funding through the Arkansas Outdoor Recreation grants program, and the Arkansas Department of Transportation Recreational Trails grant program, which could help fund future improvements to include:

- Scoreboards for existing fields
- Soccer Fields
- Youth Football Fields
- Batting Cages
- Soft and/or hard surface trails for walking/jogging/cycling

Establishment of a Parks and Recreation Department with a multi-year Parks and Recreation budget would make possible longer term future planning and fundraising for:

- Playground improvements and expansions
- Sidewalk and trail improvements and expansions
- More community events

Creation of a Parks and Recreation Department with an employee dedicated to planning for all recreation in the City of Elkins, with their own designated budget, and a Parks and Recreation advisory committee that is allowed to fulfill the obligations set forth in the current ordinance would allow for the possibility of considerably more benefit to a larger subset of our residents, while also bringing in more funds to help finance future expansions of park facilities and activities.