

WORK SESSION OF THE GREENBELT CITY COUNCIL held Wednesday, November 2, 2016, to discuss Voting Age and Mandan Road Basketball Courts.

Mayor Pro Tem Davis started the meeting at 8:04 p.m. The meeting was held in Room 201 of the Greenbelt Community Center.

PRESENT WERE: Councilmembers Konrad E. Herling, Leta M. Mach, Edward V. J. Putens, Rodney M. Roberts and Mayor Pro Tem Judith F. Davis. Mayor Emmett V. Jordan was unable to attend due to a work commitment. Councilmember Silke I. Pope was detained and arrived at 8:30 p.m.

STAFF PRESENT WERE: Michael McLaughlin, City Manager; Tom Kemp, Acting Police Chief; Joe McNeal, Assistant Director of Recreation; and Cindy Murray, City Clerk.

ALSO PRESENT WERE: Ema Smith and Hunter Whaples, Youth Advisory Committee; Pam Gregory, Board of Elections; Syed Shamim, Margo Hill, Ron Dean and Anitra Byers, Windsor Green; Kathleen Gallagher, Greenbelt News Review; Bill Orleans and Colin Byrd.

Voting Age

Ms. Smith reviewed the Youth Advisory Committee (YAC) Report #2015-1 which recommends that the City lower the voting age for municipal elections to allow for 16 and 17 year olds to vote in the elections. She said that 16 and 17 year olds have the ability to drive vehicles, work and pay taxes, but don't have a voice in government. Ms. Smith said YAC believes that it would be beneficial to the entire community to make this proposed change.

Mr. Whaples advised that high school students must take a government class in their freshman year which provides them with an understanding of government.

Ms. Gregory said the Board of Elections (BoE) focuses on the processes of administration of the election and voting. She said it is Council's decision regarding changes to existing election law.

Ms. Davis mentioned that the Cities of Hyattsville and Takoma Park already allow 16 and 17 year olds to vote in municipal elections. Ms. Murray reviewed statistics provided by the City of Takoma Park from its last two elections. She noted that Takoma Park also allows for same-day registration of voters and the majority of 16 and 17 year old voters registered on election day.

Ms. Murray explained that individuals are allowed to pre-register to vote at the age of 16 in Maryland but they are not considered "eligible" voters until they are 18 years of age. She said that if the City chose to allow 16 and 17 year olds to vote in municipal elections, the County will include the names of all pre-registered 16 and 17 year olds on the voting list for municipal elections.

There was discussion regarding the election questionnaire from the 2015 election which included a question on whether the City should lower its voting age to 16. The results indicated that 77% of respondents opposed this change, 19% supported the change and 4% did not provide a response.

Ms. Mach said she believes that likely everyone that completed the survey was over the age of 18 so she was not surprised to see that 77% indicated they opposed the change.

Ms. Davis asked what the process would be if Council decided to move forward with allowing 16 and 17 year olds to vote in municipal elections. Ms. Murray and Mr. McLaughlin explained that a charter amendment would be required to amend the City Code. It was also noted that the charter amendment would need to address the age for candidates.

Mr. Orleans asked and was provided answers to several questions.

After further discussion, Council requested this item be included on the agenda for the next meeting for possible actions such as: 1) referrals to advisory groups; and 2) scheduling a public hearing.

Windsor Green Basketball Courts

Ms. Davis explained that due to past criminal incidents, culminating in a shooting, the rims were removed from the basketball courts on Mandan Road about four years ago. She said the City has sent several inquiries to the Windsor Green Board asking for their thoughts as to whether the rims should be reinstalled or remain removed but has not received a response thus far.

Ms. Smith reviewed the YAC Report #2014-1 which recommends that the City reinstall the rims on the basketball courts on Mandan Road. She said YAC believes basketball courts are an outlet that enables youth to engage in physical activity and the isolated incident (shooting) should not deter the majority of youth from engaging in a popular pastime. Ms. Smith noted the importance of sports for the development of youth.

Ms. Byers said she would like the rims reinstalled with continuous police monitoring of the courts. She added this would be beneficial to the children in the area.

Mr. Dean explained that many years ago Windsor Green had removed all its basketball courts because of the use of the courts by adults from outside the community who were causing problems. He expressed concern about having the rims reinstalled and said the police can't be expected to monitor the courts all the time. He suggested use of the location for play equipment, tennis or volleyball.

Mr. McNeal said the Recreation Department would like to have the rims reinstalled on the basketball courts. He stressed the importance of providing residents an opportunity for physical activity and socialization. Mr. McNeal said signage could be installed directing users to contact the Police Department if there were any problems.

In response to a question from Ms. Davis, Mr. McNeal said there are 15 public basketball courts throughout the City. Acting Chief Kemp said these basketball courts generally have a good deal of activity and have not been a police problem.

Mr. Shamim said the Windsor Green Board had not taken an official position on whether to reinstall the rims. He said he believes the court would need round the clock protection if the rims were reinstalled.

Ms. Hill expressed concern about the courts attracting nonresidents. She said she doesn't think the rims should be reinstalled.

Ms. Byers also expressed concern about crime in the area such as packages being stolen off of residents' porches, vehicle break-ins, etc. She attributed the problem to the pathway that individuals use to enter and exit the area. Ms. Davis suggested Ms. Byers discuss the crime problem further with Acting Chief Kemp.

Mr. Roberts said the Police Department should be able to monitor the basketball courts and enforce the closing time. He said the courts should not be removed entirely. Mr. McNeal advised that the closing time of all city parks is 11:00 p.m. There was discussion regarding closing the basketball courts at an earlier time, perhaps 9:00 p.m.

Acting Chief Kemp explained that the area of the basketball courts on Mandan Road has unique geographical challenges including its location on the city line and a well-traveled pathway that runs from Chelsea Woods to Doctors Community Hospital. He added that unlike many other basketball courts in the city that are located in open areas, there is not good visibility of the Windsor Green courts. Acting Chief Kemp said the area had been considered a bit of a "hot spot" for crime in the past and the police had to provide a high level of police presence at times. He noted that signage posted indicating the time the basketball courts are closed would be very helpful for police enforcement. He added that although the area presented challenges, the police department can handle the challenges but there would be a cost to provide constant and consistent monitoring.

Ms. Davis mentioned that the Public Safety Advisory Committee (PSAC) is currently reviewing areas for the placement of security cameras and said this may be an area to be considered.

Mr. Putens spoke about constant problems with the use of the Mandan Road basketball courts by nonresidents in the past, including alcohol, drugs, assaults, etc. He said this activity ceased when the rims were removed from the courts. Mr. Putens stressed that if the rims are reinstalled, it will require commitments from the Police and Recreation Departments to provide constant monitoring which will be expensive.

Ms. Mach said there needs to be a way to resolve the situation and make it possible for the court to be utilized and, if not, then the court is in the wrong location and should be relocated. The possibility of a fence and timed locks for the courts was briefly discussed but it was noted that fences and locks can be cut.

In response to a question from Ms. Pope, Ms. Byers said that the Windsor Green Board had not taken a position on the matter. She said a resident survey needs to be conducted.

Mr. McLaughlin mentioned that one hoop had been removed from the basketball court in University Square to make it a half-court which significantly reduced the problems attributed to use of the basketball court. He also said the possibility of partnering with Eleanor Roosevelt High School to improve its basketball courts for use by residents, as well as students, may be worth consideration.

Ms. Davis reviewed the following suggestions discussed:

- 1. Relocate basketball court;*

2. *Cut underbrush to allow for better visibility;*
3. *Provide regular police patrols and closer monitoring of the area;*
4. *Installation of a security camera;*
5. *Installation of a fence;*
6. *Making a half court instead of a full court;*
7. *Partnering with Eleanor Roosevelt High School on basketball courts; and*
8. *Installation of signs specifying court closing time.*

Ms. Davis summarized the next steps included: 1) Windsor Green doing a resident survey on the basketball courts; 2) YAC will look at the situation further and report back to Council; and 3) the Recreation Department will reexamine the site and make a recommendation. She added that signage on the courts should go up as soon as possible to get people used to the idea that the area will close at a certain time, such as 9:00 p.m.

Informational Items

Ms. Mach reported on her attendance at the Prince George's County School Board Boundary Hearing.

Ms. Davis, Ms. Mach, Ms. Pope and Mr. Putens commented on their attendance at the Greenbriar Crime Meeting.

Ms. Davis noted 2016 is the 75th anniversary of Pearl Harbor and suggested this be included in the Veterans Day Proclamation. She also suggested Council send a letter to the Greenbelt American Legion for its Pearl Harbor Day event.

The meeting ended at 10:15 p.m.

Respectfully submitted,

*Cindy Murray
City Clerk*