February 23, 2005, 5:30 p.m.
Administrative Complex Board Meeting Room

The February meeting of the Santa Rosa County Parks and Recreation Committee was held at the Administrative Complex beginning at 5:30 p.m. on Wednesday, February 23, 2005. The following members were present representing the sports associations and host organizations: Robert Breland, Robert Saville, and Martin Campbell, Futbol Club of Santa Rosa, Inc., Santa Rosa Soccer Park; David Radcliffe, Tiger Point Park Board, Tiger Point Recreational Park; and Larry Dixon and Darrin Nicely, Navarre Youth Sports Association, Navarre Sports Complex/Navarre Football-Soccer Park/Holley Ball Field.

Absent were representatives from Pace Athletic and Recreational Park, East Milton Recreational Park, Chumuckla Community Center and Park, Fidelis Community Center and Park, Benny Russell Park, and Swenson Park.

Also present were County Administrator, Hunter Walker; the Administrative Services/Parks Operations Department, Tammy Simmons and Kristin Schepper; Pat D'Asaro with the Bagdad Village Preservation Association; John Norton with the City of Milton Parks and Recreation Department; Ray Palmer with the Pensacola Sports Association; and Ken Garner with the Navarre Press.

The meeting was called to order at 5:35 p.m.

The Administrative Services Manager welcomed all. Minutes from the January 26, 2005, meeting were accepted as written.

The first item on the agenda for discussion was the sports associations' procedures and methods for performing background checks of coaches, umpires, and volunteers having contact with children under the age of 18.

Nicely explained that the NYSA had been working on a Code of Conduct sheet and a Volunteer Policy form that were intended to work together as cohesive documents and reference tools for coaches, volunteers, and players at NYSA. He passed out the documents as examples for the Committee. He explained that the guidelines and policies must be adopted by the NYSA Board and posted in order to be enforceable. Further, NYSA would like to database their volunteers and NYSA members and are planning to purchase the Organizer Deluxe software by Primasoft. This database would actually enable the County to verify that the NYSA did in fact perform a background check on those individuals that it claimed it did. NYSA plans to check a minimum of one-third of its volunteers.

Nicely then discussed some of the background check research that he had conducted over the last month. The Santa Rosa County School Board only checks its volunteers through the sexual offenders' web page with the State of Florida. It relies on everyone being honest on the application, and it cannot prevent anyone from volunteering unless they are a sex offender or lie on their application. Further, AYSO has the same restrictions for volunteers as the SRC School Board.

Simmons then presented the draft policy for background checks as prepared by the Parks Operations Department and provided an explanation of the handouts and research conducted by County staff. She explained that the County saw the background checks as acting as a deterrent; it was more likely that people with something negative in their history would not contest a background check if it came back negative. Palmer then suggested that the draft policy as presented be forwarded to the County Attorney and Risk Manager in order for them to formulate the official policy and procedures. However, Simmons reiterated that it was the Parks and Recreation Committee's task to establish standards with regard to exactly what constituted a reasonable and fair background check. The Committee then formulated the following questions to be posed to the County Attorney before proceeding:

· What do we have to watch out for with regard to wording?

· What can the County do if a background check comes back negative?

John Norton with the City of Milton then addressed the committee and presented the procedures that Emerald Coast Football, the league that utilizes the City of Milton's fields, uses with regard to background checks. While Emerald Coast Football claims that they perform background checks, Mr. Norton contests that they do not and that there is no oversight with regard to the system. The football group wears cards, but these are distributed when the volunteers register and before the check is actually performed; this makes no sense and does not provide any sort of protection for the children. In contrast, Norton explained that in larger cities like Nashville, he observed a system wherein volunteers participated in a large workshop where the Code of Conduct was explained and identification cards were issued at the end. As such, any adult that entered the fence of the field was checked for an ID card; however, concession volunteers were not dealt with. Norton envisions a system where Santa Rosa and Escambia Counties, as well as all the cities, utilize the same plan and procedures for background checks since all the children are participating in activities at the same parks.

At the conclusion of this discussion, the Parks and Recreation Committee was tasked with reviewing the draft policy and procedures as developed by the Parks Operations Department. Each management organization should come to the next meeting prepared to discuss exactly which volunteers should be screened by the background checks and what offenses should be determined to be disqualifications for volunteering. Nicely suggested that a stepped approach to background checks be implemented and re-emphasized a need to establish a standard set of policies and procedures before things get out of hand as they have in other counties.

Radcliffe asked who would be responsible for the cost of performing said background checks? A representative from the Futbol Club explained that background check costs were taken out of registration fees. Norton said that Emerald Coast Football coaches pay for the background checks, and a NYSA representative said that the registration fees they collect are used.

A further item tasked to the Committee to come back with a recommendation at the next meeting was how often the checks should be run per person – every year? Every three years? Also, what percentage of the volunteer population should be screened each year – 30%? 50%? 100%?

Simmons then brought up the issue of FEMA reimbursement at each of the recreational parks and asked each park with scoreboards damaged or destroyed by Hurricane Ivan to provide the County with copies of their agreements with the sponsorship organization (i.e., Coca Cola, Pepsi Cola, etc.). The County will then review these contracts and submit them to FEMA if they are eligible for FEMA reimbursement.

The items to be taken up at the next meeting, which is scheduled for Wednesday, March 23, 2005, at 5:30 p.m., at the Santa Rosa County Administrative Complex Board meeting room, are discussion of financial issues for sports associations to be presented by Randy Sansom and continued discussion of a draft plan for standardization of background checks.

The meeting adjourned at 6:40 p.m.