

City Business
“The New Park Policy”
by Michael Leamons

Although it's still three weeks until Easter, the tender green leaves on the mesquite trees testify to the arrival of spring. It's time for picnics, bar-be-ques and other types of outings, so a review of the recently adopted Park Policy should prove timely.

A synopsis of the proposed policy along with an invitation to participate in the process was included in a previous column regarding the February 15th Council Agenda: “A policy to regulate City Park reservations and use will be considered. A key provision is to require refundable deposits from entities reserving all, or portions, of the park to ensure the grounds and equipment are left in at least as good of a condition as they were in prior to use by the entity. Currently, at the taxpayers' expense, the City often has to do repairs and pick up trash following events...Should you wish to weigh in on any of the above agenda items, please call your elected representatives and/or make plans to attend the meeting.”

The policy and an accompanying schedule of use and deposit fees was adopted by the Council. Sponsors of public events (including HISD) were exempted from user fees, but were required to comply with the deposit requirements. Private parties wanting to reserve any of the pavilions, in addition to a deposit, are also required to pay a use fee of between \$25 and \$100 depending upon the number of participants and the facility to be used. There is a sign up sheet, and the park's facilities are available upon a first come, first served basis.

Since HISD hosts numerous events in the park throughout the year, in an attempt to head off potential future misunderstandings, a copy of the policy was forwarded to that institution immediately after its adoption.

Undoubtedly, some will object to the new deposit and use fees, but please let me elaborate on the rationale behind the new policy. As City Administrator, it has been my goal to manage the City's resources in such a way that more of those resources can be allocated toward infrastructure improvements. Virtually everyone complains about the streets, and we all know what a problem we've had with water main breaks. It takes money to address these infrastructure needs. By saving a little here and a little there, eventually a difference can be made. (As you know, the City is trying to leverage those savings with grant funding.) At the most recent Council Meeting, the Council authorized the disconnection of some 400 watt flood lights at City Park at an annual savings of \$3,524. Except for Old Settlers Days (don't worry all the mercury vapor lights are still operating), the Park is very seldom open at night, and I couldn't find anyone who knew of those high wattage floodlights being put to good use. So, why fritter away \$3,524/year?

In the same vein, why fritter away City time and money cleaning up and fixing up behind someone who hasn't been responsible in their use of City Park? Previously, there wasn't a policy, which probably explains why at one of the stock shows the new restroom facility was used as a wash barn to wash down some of the contestants. No, I'm not making that up! True, the Park is a public asset and should be available for everyone's enjoyment, but isn't it reasonable to have a mechanism requiring it be treated with respect?

Is there a better mechanism than a refundable deposit? If so, let's talk about it. If there's a better way to achieve the desired result, I'm sure the Council would be willing to give the matter serious consideration. Nevertheless, as it stands right now, this is what the policy requires:

“After the event is over and clean up is completed, the City will re-inspect the reserved site to determine if any repairs or additional clean up are required. If repairs or clean up are required, the Event Holder will be provided with a list of specific deficiencies and asked to restore the area to pre-event conditions. Should the Event Holder fail to comply with the City's request, the full amount of the deposit will be forfeited. If the cleaning and repair costs are greater than the amount on deposit, the Event Holder will be responsible for paying the difference.”

Staff will be working to keep a well groomed and maintained park ready for your enjoyment.

May God bless the City of Hico.