



2024 REPORT TO THE MAYOR AND CITY COUNCIL

for the period October 22, 2022 to June 28, 2024



Board members at Lavaland Park on the 6/21/24 field trip

OVERVIEW

The Metropolitan Parks and Recreation Advisory Board (MPRAB) was established for the following purposes: (A) To keep itself informed of city parks and recreation needs and to serve as a forum for public discussion; (B) To encourage the greatest use of parks and recreation programs including cooperation with other agencies and organizations which are involved in providing recreation services for the public good.

According to Ordinance 10-1-2-4, the duties and responsibilities of the MPRAB are the following:

1. **The Board shall recommend to the Mayor policies** for overall development of the park system to include plans for additional parks and recreation facilities involving the joint-use concept with the Albuquerque Public School System and ways and means of financing improvements.
2. **The Board shall meet at least quarterly**, and may hold additional meetings at its discretion.
3. **The Board shall conduct open public meetings and give reasonable notice of such meetings.**

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4. **The Board may form such subcommittees** as are necessary from the public at large to make recommendations to the Board in order to carry out the assigned responsibilities of the Board.
 5. **The Board**, in order to fulfill its responsibilities, **can review:**
 - (1) The design and or plan for a project for a park and or a recreation facility;
 - (2) The system inventory of parks and recreation facilities; and
 - (3) The Master Plan for the park and recreation system.
 6. **The Board shall prepare and submit an annual report** of its activities to the Mayor and the Council.

The MPRAB - at full membership - consists of 11 members all of whom shall reside in the City of Albuquerque. When appointed there is one member of the Board from each City Council District and two members who serve at large. All members are volunteers.



PRD staff and board members on the 6/21/24 field trip

MEMBERSHIP

From October, 2022 to June, 2024 board membership varied – from a low of 4 members to a high of 7 – never reaching full membership of 11. **Because low membership (especially when the board had only 4 members) presented an obstacle to achieving the board’s goals and priorities, the MPRAB and Parks and Recreation Department (PRD) staff made concerted efforts to encourage the appointment of new members during the report period. Efforts included:**

1. Board members inviting friends, colleagues, and other city residents to apply for board membership;

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2. **Board members encouraging city councilors to promote the board and ask their constituents to apply for board service;**
 3. **PRD staff using social media and other means to promote applications to the board;**

As of May of 2024, the board was aware of five applicants to the MPRAB (having submitted applications through their city councilors) who had waited 2 years, 15 months, 1 year, 9 months, and 5 months (respectively) without any action (yea or nay) on their applications. In most of these cases, applicants also never received updates on the status of their applications.

One of the challenges to making board appointments is related to a requirement of city ordinance 10-1-2-3. The relevant passage reads as follows:

“When a vacancy on the Board occurs, the Councilor representing the District in which the vacating member of the board resides, shall nominate two members to the board who reside in his or her respective Council District and the Mayor shall appoint one of these recommended members...”

If a city councilor receives only one applicant, s/he is not able to fulfill this particular requirement.

As a result of the above, and in order to attempt to remedy the situation, the MPRAB:

4. **Examined the ordinance governing appointments to the MPRAB** and, having discovered a remedy in the full text of the ordinance,
5. **Sent a letter to the Mayor and City Councilors** highlighting the following, additional section of the ordinance:

“When a vacancy occurs on the Board or no more than 30 days prior to the expiration of a member’s term, the Mayor may notify the Councilor representing the District in which that member of the Board resides of the vacancy or term expiration. If that Councilor fails to nominate two members to the Board or to reappoint a member to the Board within 30 days of receiving such notification, the Mayor may appoint a member to the Board to represent that Councilor’s District, subject to the advice and consent of the City Council.”

In other words the Mayor, in the absence of receiving two nominations from a City Councilor, may appoint a member to the board for that Councilor’s district regardless of how many applications were received.

As of the date of this report, MPRAB membership consists of the following:

At-Large- Tony Johnson, Valerie Martinez; ***District 1-*** Vacant; ***District 2-*** Julie Radoslovich; ***District 3-*** Anna Nelson, Ph.D.; ***District 4-*** Vacant; ***District 5-*** John Ajie; ***District 6-*** David Duhigg; ***District 7-*** Cynthia Serna; ***District 8-*** Vacant; ***District 9-*** Fredrica Bergquist

Currently, Valerie Martínez (at-large) is the Chair and Julie Radoslovich (District 2) is the Vice Chair of the MPRAB.



Mandala created by community members at Pat Hurley Park Pop-Up event 4/27/24

ACTIVITIES

During the report period, members of the MPRAB engaged in the following activities:

1. **Convened monthly meetings that were open to the public** (except when field trips or retreats were held in lieu of monthly meetings), including giving the appropriate public notice of such monthly meetings;
2. **Organized and convened a board retreat** (focusing on board development, parks activation, and promotion of department activities);
3. **Participated in two field trips** organized and hosted by Parks and Recreation staff. In the first instance board members visited 8 parks (October 20, 2023) and were able to talk to four members of Albuquerque Public Schools staff about joint use of Garfield Park. In the second instance (June 21, 2024) board members visited 11 underutilized parks and, at Laland Park, met with the president of the community association;
4. **Created and convened subcommittee meetings** (including Board Development, Park Activation, Park Promotion, and ad hoc as necessary);
5. **Attended and promoted various park/open space events;**
6. **Completed a review and revision of the MPRAB [Park Name Change Policy](#)**, partly in response to the Mayor's "Stories of Us" initiative. The board also heard from family members of Bennie J. Hargrove as well as supporting residents and NM Representative Pamela Herndon who weighed in to support the renaming of Washington Middle School Park to Bennie Hargrove Park (May of 2023);

7. **Viewed legislative and city capital outlay requests** (after they had been submitted by PRD) and advocated in support of projects via our respective legislators;
8. **Improved the process of onboarding new board members** by creating documents that describe the mission and purpose of the MPRAB, the activities of subcommittees; and ongoing work and accomplishments of the MPRAB so that new members can more effectively and quickly integrate themselves into board work;
9. **Improved the process by which board members collaborate on key documents** by utilizing shared files that encourage board members collective' input, feedback, and revision;
10. **Launched a pilot program to study one underutilized city park** (in 2024) that includes research and community engagement;
11. **Prepared a report.**



PRD Park Pop-Up Logo

PRIORITIES

As a result of the above activities, the MPRAB identified several priorities in order to fulfill its mission, duties and responsibilities during the report period:

1. **Encourage appointments to the MPRAB and a more effective board orientation process;**
2. **Educate MPRAB members about why certain city parks are underutilized** (via field trips, research, and a community engagement process), and propose solutions;
3. **Encourage activation of parks, especially underutilized parks;**
4. **Encourage collaborations and partnerships to maximize park activation efforts/initiatives;**
5. **Encourage more effective promotion of PRD activities** to both residents and visitors;
6. **Encourage a more effective approach to overall parks development, maintenance, and use**, with an emphasis on **increased funding and support for department operations and programming**. The board recognizes the vital importance of building new parks and renovating others as well as hosting large, special events (tournaments, races, etc.). We also see a critical need to fund and support the operations (e.g. maintenance and staffing) and activation (programming) of existing parks which increases community-based monitoring and public safety while promoting

physical activity and social cohesion. Currently, a lack of funding for park operations and programming is a problem that needs to be rectified.

7. **Become more well-informed about PRD’s budget priorities** before they are submitted to the New Mexico state legislature and proposed for the annual city budget. As mentioned above, in 2023 and 2024 the board viewed budget and capital outlay requests after they had been submitted and board members advocated in support of priority projects with our respective legislators. In the future, we plan to review revenue requests before they are submitted (see below, “Action on Priorities”).



Photo credit: PRD Facebook

ACTION ON PRIORITIES

1. See **MEMBERSHIP**, above.
2. See **ACTIVITIES**, above.
3. The MPRAB is developing a **“Park Activation Guide”** for residents, neighborhood associations, and other interested individuals and/or organizations with useful information and recommendations for organizing park events, cultivating partnerships and collaborations, fundraising, and more.
4. In 2022, the MPRAB studied the PRD webpages and, at the October 2022 retreat, **made recommendations for a more user-friendly website that would more effectively promote department activities and encourage the general public and visitors to engage with the parks system.**
5. The board engaged in robust discussions with PRD leaders and staff about the **critical need for additional support and funding for parks activation (i.e, programming).** The board’s insistence on this support is informed by study and research, namely:

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- a. A 2013 National Institutes of Health (NIH) [research study](#) entitled “Use of neighborhood parks: does socio-economic status matter? A four-city study” which included Albuquerque, Chapel Hill/Durham, NC; Cleveland, OH; and Philadelphia, PA. Parks in these four cities were observed “systematically in three seasons (spring, summer and autumn), with nearly 36,000 park users observed.” **The main finding of this report was that park programming is the most important factor regarding park use.** This finding is particularly important in that many assume that low levels of physical activity are due to lack of access to parks. In fact, Albuquerque scores high marks in terms of a park being within a 10 minute walk for most. The more pressing issue is that existing park spaces are underutilized.
 - b. A [briefing paper](#) published by the American Planning Association entitled “How Cities Use Parks to Create Safer Neighborhoods” (2004) concluded the following: **“For those concerned that green spaces may foster crime and illegal activity, evidence now exists that the opposite may be true. When adjacent to residential areas, green spaces have been shown to create neighborhoods with fewer violent and property crimes and where neighbors tend to support and protect one another.** These are the findings of scientists at the Human-Environment Research Laboratory of the University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign who studied green space alongside public housing in Chicago. Other researchers who are conducting similar studies across the country are finding similar results.”

The board would like to recognize one important PRD effort to improve park activation, the “Park Pop-Up” initiative. This program makes small grants available to local community organizations to activate city parks. This has resulted in some wonderful community events. However, funding for this initiative is extremely limited and there is no significant, year-to-year financial support for parks activation/programming apart from Open Space Education and Public Space Programs.

6. The board established a schedule for the PRD to **share budget items and priorities with the MPRAB** in advance of the state legislative sessions and due dates for the annual city budget. As a result, board members can both review the information and provide feedback as well as advocate for parks funding with New Mexico legislators and City Councilors.



Photos credit: PRD Facebook

POLICY RECOMMENDATIONS

As a result of the above activities and priorities, the MPRAB recommends the following:

BOARD APPOINTMENTS

In order to encourage consistent, full membership of the MPRAB, and to manage applications and applicants more effectively:

1. [from Ordinance 10-1-2-3] **When a vacancy occurs on the MPRAB or no more than 30 days prior to the expiration of a member's term, the Mayor's office should notify the Councilor representing the District in which that member of the Board resides of the vacancy or term expiration.**
2. [from Ordinance 10-1-2-3] **If the Councilor [in the above situation] fails to nominate two members to the Board or to reappoint a member to the Board within 30 days of receiving such notification, the Mayor should appoint a member to the Board to represent that Councilor's District, subject to the advice and consent of the City Council.**

In this case, a City Councilor may choose to forward the name of a single applicant to the Mayor, with the Councilor's approval, so that the Mayor may consider this applicant if he exercises his right to appoint a board member in the absence of two recommendations.

3. **City Councilors should acknowledge the receipt of an application for the MPRAB within one week so the applicant knows that his/her/their application has been received. In addition, City Councilors should provide all applicants with an update about the status of their application for the MPRAB on a monthly or bi-monthly basis.**

PARK ACTIVATION

1. **The Mayor's annual budget should always include funding for PRD operations (e.g., park maintenance and staff) and park activation (i.e., programming) in addition to capital outlay for new parks and renovations.** Activation is as important as construction and renovation, and consistently funding this recognizes the fact that parks activation/programming promotes public safety, physical activity, youth engagement, grass-roots monitoring, and social cohesion. In addition, consistent care and maintenance of the parks system must also be a funding priority.. New and renovated parks, activated parks, demand consistent and effective maintenance.
2. **As a stopgap measure, the Mayor should immediately allocate \$80,000 for a FY 2024-2025 "Park Activation Program."** The fund would be administered by PRD and support the activation of parks with a special emphasis on underutilized spaces. Funding would support staffing, events/activities, materials, food and beverage subsidies, collaborations/partnerships, security, promotion, and more. PRD would manage the funds and create clear and equitable criteria for allocating funds to parks in-need.

PARK PROMOTION

1. **The Mayor's office should provide PRD with technical assistance and funding to analyze, reorganize and redesign the current PRD web pages** so that they are much more user-friendly and effective in guiding residents and visitors to park activities, programs, amenities, and events. Particular attention should be paid to a single landing

page (rather than two), a calendar of events, a beautiful, user-friendly map of city parks that lists their amenities, promotion of the Park Pop Up program and other opportunities for residents to access programming funding, and how-to information encouraging residents and community organizations to activate their nearby parks. The process should also provide support for locating excellent examples of other cities' parks and recreation websites and using these to help recreate/redesign the current PRD pages.

CONCLUSION

The board would like to recognize and applaud a significant achievement by the City of Albuquerque and PRD: Albuquerque's 2024 [Park Score Ranking](#) of #15 in the nation by the Trust for Public Land. Albuquerque is the only city in the desert southwest to be ranked in the top 15, accompanied by cities with vastly different geographies and climates, including Washington, DC; Minneapolis; Chicago, IL; San Francisco, and Portland. Noteworthy is the fact that Albuquerque scored a high 87 in the category of "Access," the "portion of residents within a 10 minute walk of a park." However, Albuquerque ranks last in the top 15 in terms of investment, scoring a 59. **Now is the time to invest in activating and maintaining our city parks, especially those that are currently underutilized. All of the board's policy recommendations, in this report, promote increased activation of our extensive parks system for the health, safety, happiness, and social cohesion of the citizens of Albuquerque.**

Metropolitan Parks and Recreation Advisory Board Members:

John Ajie (District 5)

Fredrica "Rickie" Bergquist (District 9)

David Duhigg (District 4)

Tony Johnson (At-Large)

Valerie Martínez (Chair, At-large)

Anna Nelson (District 3)

Julie Radoslovich (Vice Chair, District 2)

Cynthia Serna (District 7)



Photos credit: PRD Facebook