

City Council Youth & Recreation Committee
Receives Citizens Advisory Panel's NORD Reform Proposal

News Release

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Contact:
Jaime Guillet
Office of Councilmember-
at-Large
Arnie Fielkow
Ph: (504) 658-1063
Cell: (504) 957-2035
jiguillet@cityofno.com

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*New Orleans Recreation Citizens Advisory Panel
Co-Chairs Roy Glapion Jr., Rod West, and
Bobby Garon*

New Orleans, LA - August 28, 2009 - The New Orleans City Council's Youth and Recreation Committee today received a presentation from the New Orleans Recreation Citizens Advisory Panel (CAP), regarding its proposals for revitalizing New Orleans Recreation Department (NORD) facilities, including the creation of a new, independent recreation and playground commission governing entity and increased funding through a property tax millage. Click [here](#) to view the CAP presentation.

Entergy New Orleans President and CEO Rod West, who co-chairs CAP with Roy Glapion and Bobby Garon, provided the committee with a 42-page summary of the revitalization, the result of more than a year of discussions, research and public input.

"NORD is extremely important to this panel and we said from the beginning that if we were going to take this issue on, nothing would be off limits," said West. "This discussion would be an intellectually honest discussion and we would be disregarding turf battles."

CAP's proposal consists of restoring NORD's parks and playgrounds - which 30 years ago served as an exceptional and activity-filled outlet for New Orleans youth - by increasing funding, both public and private, and creating an independent commission composed of a cross section of the community. CAP's proposed commission would be a 12-member board, for which the mayor and City Council would make nominations. Area university presidents select the ultimate members. The mayor's office would have five appointees, the City Council five appointees, the New Orleans Hornets one appointee and the New Orleans Saints one appointee.

West and the other CAP members emphasized these reform proposals do not represent a "privatizing" of the city's recreational facilities, pointing out that this new entity would be an independent public body subject to all public record and meetings laws. This independence renders NORD less prone to the pitfalls of political turnover as the commission would be tasked with the freedom to hire a superintendent, who would be the single point of accountability, West said. That frequent turnover -12 directors in 31 years - results in poor continuity and instability of programs, said West. All of these reforms would be completed through a public referendum and Home Rule Charter amendment.

"We can do nothing by accepting the status quo or we can hold ourselves to a higher standard for our children," he said.

West elaborated to the committee CAP's determined "must-have" principles for success, which were adopted from many of the recreational department best practices around the country, including Philadelphia, Cincinnati and East Baton Rouge Parish. He emphasized the need for "bundling" both the reformed governance structure and the dedicated financial component, saying doing one without the other would set the proposal up for failure. West told committee members the timeline for a voter referendum is fluid and up for debate, which he would leave in the City Council's hands.

CAP members proposed a voter-approved property tax millage that acknowledges the current economic climate across the country by phasing it over 15 years but ultimately would increase the annual budget to \$20 million, vastly improving the average \$5 million NORD receives annually, said West. Currently, NORD receives its budget from a 1.09 millage and annual general fund revenues for the total \$5 million. The new property tax millage would add an extra 2.5 mills in the first three years for a total \$10 million budget. In years four through eight, another 2.5 mills would be added for a total 5 mills and a \$15 million annual budget. In years nine through 15, it would increase by another 2.5 mills for a total 7.5 mills and \$20 million annual budget.

Councilmembers in attendance, including Council President Arnie Fielkow,

Council Vice President Jacquelyn Brechtel Clarkson, District "C" Councilmember James Carter and District "E" Councilmember Cynthia Willard-Lewis, thanked attending CAP members for presenting their findings and conducting this yearlong study for NORD improvements.

"I am honored to hear this presentation, knowing of your wonderful reputation and experience in public playgrounds and that you have been very concerned about this particular issue for more than 20 years," said Carter. "I want to thank you all for your thoughtfulness and you have done a tremendous job bringing this to us."

Council President Arnie Fielkow, who chairs the committee, said the council consistently has looked at fact-based evidence of what has worked and appreciated the due diligence performed by West and other CAP members. Fielkow said he has long been disturbed by the inequity within NORD facilities and advocated that now is the time for change.

"The reason I ran for office more than any other topic was for the children of this community," said Fielkow. "We have an opportunity to change the lives of our kids for years to come, to change the status quo. My hope is the council has the courage to put this issue up during its term, either this fall or after the first of the year. CAP members have done an incredible job. Hopefully we can repay you with an incredible NORD system in the future. I look forward to continuing that dialogue."

New Orleans City Council

The New Orleans City Council is the legislative branch of New Orleans City government. The Council considers and enacts all local laws that govern the City of New Orleans. The Council also approves the operating and capital budgets for the City, as recommended by the mayor, and continually monitors revenues and expenditures for local government operations. The City Council is also the regulatory body for public utilities. It also reviews and has final say on many land use and zoning matters, as well as considers major economic development projects for the City. As a Board of Review for Orleans Parish, the Council examines appeals of property tax assessments for real estate taxes, and certifies tax rolls to the Louisiana Tax Commission. Other responsibilities of the Council include overseeing the operation of the public access television in Orleans Parish.

The City Council is comprised of five districts and two councilmembers-at-large. Council President and Councilmember-at-Large Arnie Fielkow; Council Vice President and Councilmember-at-Large Jacquelyn Brechtel Clarkson; District "A" Councilmember Shelley Midura; District "B" Councilmember Stacy Head; District "C" Councilmember James Carter; District "D" Councilmember Cynthia Hedge-Morrell; and District "E" Councilmember Cynthia Willard-Lewis.