

Town Hall – Regarding Bully Creek Park
May 28, 2025

The County Court members were asked to participate in a community town hall regarding Bully Creek Park. The organizer of the town hall was Raymond Hage; and was held at the Vale Senior Center. Judge Dan Joyce, Commissioner Ron Jacobs, Commissioner Jim Mendiola, and Road Supervisor Dave Tiffany participated in the town hall. Approximately 30 members of the public were in attendance; also in attendance was Antonio Sunseri with the Argus Observer.

Raymond Hage opened the town hall with comments regarding his observation of the decline of the park over the last ten years; his efforts to obtain information regarding the park; suggestions for the park including, installing a suggestion box, providing WiFi in the park, updating the irrigation system, removal and/or trimming of dead and overgrown trees; and inquired what the action plan was for removing dead trees and managing gopher holes and whistle pigs, whether or not the bathrooms were all in working order, how to apply for the caretaker position, and what BOR's (Bureau of Reclamation) involvement is with the facility; and noted that County staff and Commissioner Jacobs have been actively working at the park.

Commissioner Jacobs explained that the irrigation system is over 50 years old; staff is actively working on the system. The County is in the process of applying for a grant through Bureau of Reclamation (BOR) to replace the irrigation system. The County has also made application to BOR for O&M funding (operations and maintenance assistance funding). The County has not received financial support from BOR in the past. Rather, BOR representatives were more focused on ADA (Americans with Disabilities Act) deficiencies. Currently, the County is working with a new BOR representative who recognizes the need for funding assistance for general operations and maintenance of the facility. A plumber has completed repairs of the bathrooms, the lawn is being irrigated (waterlines are frequently breaking) and mowed, and a contractor is spraying weeds and working on gopher and ground squirrel control. It is hoped to replace the irrigation system in the future which will allow for reseeding and replanting of trees.

County Economic and Community Development Coordinator Taylor Rembowski called on audience members who had questions for the Court members and Mr. Tiffany. Mr. Rembowski mentioned he wrote the O&M application for funding and also the grant application for the irrigation system; the grant requires matching funds from the County.

Chris Mohammed inquired about priority repairs such as the pump house; communication regarding dock repairs; suggested considering raising the camping fees; and suggested that BLM (Bureau of Land Management) fire crews could assist with tree removal. Mr. Tiffany explained the pump was lost a couple of summers ago and there is now a new, working pump; the dock was hit by a boat a few years ago which required removal of the dock for repairs; the caretaker and/or marine deputy notifies Mr. Tiffany when the dock needs attention. Commissioner Jacobs noted the County may consider a fee increase and may consider a proposal from Travis Schneider for tree removal.

Kat Hill inquired to the budget for tree removal; suggested holding a fundraiser; and expressed concern for the wildlife. Commissioner Jacobs noted an estimate for replacing the irrigation system is approximately \$243,000. Twenty-nine trees were removed at a cost of approximately \$38,000; and an additional 15-20 trees need to be removed. Trees that are removed must be replaced.

Commissioner Mendiola commented that there are plenty of trees in the Bully Creek area to sustain the wildlife; and thanked the City of Vale for the use of its vac truck.

Mr. Rembowski noted that park revenue last year was approximately \$40,000. Even with raising fees, the revenue is not nearly enough for operations, maintenance, and repairs.

Kelly Johnson commented that the town hall was a great idea and inquired as to who is responsible for the park. Mr. Tiffany explained that the park caretaker is under the supervision of the Road Department and himself as the Road Supervisor.

Bob Bement thanked Mr. Hage and the County and commented that everyone has the same purpose and that is getting the park restored.

Shari Tolman commented that her and her husband were the caretakers of the park for 6 summers in the 1980's and it is heartbreaking to see all the work her family did ruined; and encouraged the County to be wise and thoughtful in the selection of the next caretaker.

Mike Young said his question had been answered as that was who was responsible. Commissioner Mendiola noted that while Mr. Tiffany had taken full responsibility it is also the Court's responsibility – not just Mr. Tiffany's.

Dave Westerberg thanked Mr. Hage for his work on the matter; commented that the park is an important part of the community and that his family has enjoyed the facility through the years.

Karlene Keller also inquired to accountability and if the caretaker position is subject to job performance evaluations. Mr. Tiffany explained the caretaker job vacancy is currently posted; the caretaker is accountable to Mr. Tiffany; and Mr. Tiffany is accountable to the County Court. The position is a contract position and there is a review process. Ms. Keller thanked Mr. Hage and encouraged the community members to help the community, not just complain.

Lucy Hutchens commented on the history of when the park was built and suggested the Court form an advisory council for the park facility.

Jason Tolman commented that he has personally put his blood, sweat and tears into Bully Creek as he spent six summers working there when his parents were the caretakers; suggested the adult and juvenile work crews be utilized at the park; inquired what improvements were going to be done to restore the park and what implements have been put into place to assure the community the park does not deteriorate again. Commissioner Jacobs again explained the County is currently

working to improve the park; and is actively seeking a new caretaker for the park (the job vacancy is posted).

Mr. Hage inquired if the Court members would agree to attend another town hall. Commissioner Jacobs stated individuals are welcome to contact him personally with questions/concerns. Individuals can also make public comment during the weekly County Court meetings during the public comment period.

Other suggestions from members of the public included having flyers promoting local businesses and events available at the park; having a suggestion box; promoting the park on social media; implementing a higher fee for out-of-county users; and having a camp host.

Commissioner Mendiola expressed thanks to the Road Department staff and Commissioner Jacobs for their work at the park.

Judge Joyce thanked Mr. Hage and the audience for their participation in the town hall.