

CBB turnover doesn't bode well for park

Written by Marty Carlson

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If there's a prize for the most frequent turnover in the membership of a public governing body, the Cypress Black Bayou Recreation and Water Conservation District's (CBB) Board of Commissioners is surely the winner.

Over the past 24 months, this five-member board has seen a dozen board members. As of the entity's September 18 meeting, members Walter Bigby (Bossier City), Gary Wyche (Town of Benton), and Alan Warren (Bossier Levee District) are brand new to the board. Christopher Baker (Bossier Parish School Board) has the experience of a few meetings; Robert Berry (Bossier Parish Police Jury) has been on the board about a year.

CBB is funded largely by property taxes and permits, leases and fees. The board administers a budget of about \$1.2 million annually.

One of the problems with the turn over involves how successor board appointees are selected. Each of the five governmental entities above noted appoint an individual to serve a four-year term on the CBB board. Per state law and the board's regulations, if an appointee leaves the board in the middle of his/her term, the vacant seat "shall be filled by an affirmative vote of the majority of the remaining commissioners."

To date, the remaining commissioners have deferred to the five appointing entities to fill vacancies – but those commissioners are not required to do so. And it's easy to see how that could potentially create a CBB board of self-interested members instead of those whose work on the board is fully in the public interest.

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For that reason, perhaps it's time to suggest to local state lawmakers that any vacancy on the CBB board be filled only the governmental entity whose appointee has vacated the seat.

Another concern, at least for this year, is that new board members will need some time to review CBB's current status, particularly with respect to the annual budget. Typically, the CBB administrator, Kevin Jetter, and accountant, James Bates, present a draft budget to the board in late November or early December. An amended budget for the current year, and a proposed budget for the new year are adopted by the end of December.

New CBB commissioners will need to come up to speed quickly on budget issues – and if a discussion at the board's August meeting was any indication, commissioners will need to look beyond general budgeting efforts.

During that August meeting, Bates presented the 2011 audit report, which engendered a conversation initiated by board member Robert Berry. Berry expressed concern for how to pay for long-term needs of the park, as well as capital improvements that could likely develop even greater public interest in the park's recreation draw – and generate more in revenues to the facility.

Berry suggested the possibility of bonding funds for those improvements, but was quickly advised by Bates that the park “does not accrue funds over the long haul to build a fund” to do anything along the lines of bonds.

Essentially, then, CBB's status is one of maintaining the park's current amenities at their current levels – and not looking to the future for any significant improvements. On the other hand, perhaps some of those new commissioners might be compelled to call for a little park master-planning to benefit the public that uses the park's recreation offerings, and the homeowners who have much invested in their lake-area properties.

With any luck, the current CBB board will settle in and work to make the park and its recreation facilities an even more desirable public offering.

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