



**Park & Recreation Commission Minutes of the Meeting**  
**Senior Center, John P Murzyn Hall 530 Mill St NE**  
**February 28, 2024**

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**Call to Order/Roll Call**

Tom Greenhalgh called the meeting to order at 6:00 pm

Members present: Teresa Eisenbise, Tom Greenhalgh, Dayna Gulley, Taher Harzallah, Andrew Macko, Andrea Ostergaard

Staff present: David Cullen, Public Works Interim Director; Keith Windschitl, Recreation Director; Deanna Saefke, Recreation Secretary; Amada Marquez Simula, Mayor, Council Representative; Liam Genter, Urban Forestry Specialist

**Community Forum**

None at this time.

**Consent Agenda**

Eisenbise asked why on the expenditure reports it indicates that 100% of the budget is used. Windschitl reported it looks like the 2024 budget has not been updated on that report.

**Motion** by Macko, second by Harzallah, to approve the consent agenda. Upon vote: All ayes. **Motion Carried.**

**Letters and Requests**

None at this time.

**Old Business**

Liam Genter the City of Columbia Heights Urban Forestry Specialist introduced himself. He indicated Kevin Hansen was going to attend the meeting this month and had a family situation. Genter reported he would be the person applying for these grant opportunities involving the parks. The first grant is through the DNR, the Department of Natural Resources, and would be an outdoor recreation grant. This is an annual grant is awarded at \$350,000 and is a required fifty-fifty match. Some of the items that could be included with this funding would be to upgrade and repair the walking trail at Sullivan Lake. This is the most used trail in our parks. This grant would include some types of accessories to the trail such as upgrading the lighting and the retaining wall. Staff are in the planning stages of this application and discussions with contractors. This is called the Outdoor Recreation Grant through the DNR. Ostergaard asked if additional benches could be included. Genter replied the pricing for the retaining wall would need to be obtained first in order to see what other items might fit within the costs of the project. He indicated there are other requirements with the application such as the trail, that is the main focus, it would need to be at least ten feet wide and meet ADA requirements. These requirements would all need to be met first prior to adding other elements to the application. Cullen asked if there will be a lot of applications for this grant. Genter replied that it will be highly competitive. It is a statewide program and there is a wide range of activities allowed on the application. Ostergaard asked about the condition of the bridge at Sullivan Lake Park. Genter indicated staff would like to resurface the bridge but the structure itself is in good

condition. The whole surface doesn't need new decking, just parts of it, so he doesn't feel that should even be added into the grant application. Ostergaard replied the bridge is stable unlike the retaining wall. Genter stated the bridge is in excellent condition. Cullen indicated staff have already replaced some of the treated wood underneath the bridge. This usually is done when the lake freezes because the boards are tucked in. Marquez Simula asked if this is still able to be done when the lake doesn't freeze. Cullen replied yes, the water level is low enough and it just gets mucky, but they can still get to the area. Harzallah asked what the timeline for submission is. Genter replied the application is due at the end of March and notice of awards are towards the end of summer. There is an additional environmental review after that. Completion of the project would be in 2025. Harzallah asked if there is a large amount of funding for this grant where they would be able to award multiple cities. Genter answered this is relatively a small grant, but it depends on where it gets maxed out from the recipients. Gulley asked where staff find available grants. Genter replied he receives a lot of funding opportunities through email lists with organizations like the DNR, Pollution Control, MNDOT, some federal organizations, and others. There are many sources of funding, and it is a matter of reading through all of them carefully because there are so many various qualifications, and the project needs to fit well with each type of grant. Cullen pointed out how fortunate we are to have Genter working for the city because he has an extensive background with the grant process. Most of these grants are very competitive and require very specific information. Genter stated there needs to be a project that fits the grant when there is an opportunity available.

Genter presented the second grant opportunity with the National Fitness Campaign. This group works with communities and nonprofits to build outdoor gyms that are freely accessible to everyone. The old fashion types that people might recognize are the wood structures with pullup bars. This campaign would create an outdoor workout space. There are two sizes, one is half the size of a tennis court. It has a large wall on one end and has a blue rubber surface area. It is placed on a concrete pad. There are six different workout stations. It is designed to be fully accessible, and all of the stations can be modified to fit any need. A user can scan a QR code to view a catalogue of workouts. The system is designed for ages 14 and older. One requirement is to have the area 150 feet away from any playground. Another exciting component is this grant works with a sponsor and this year it is Blue Cross Blue Sheild. They will be providing funding for ten communities. The grant is for \$50,000 towards the equipment. There is also an option for a public art component on the side of the wall that has a wrap of an artist's creation. Blue Cross Blue Sheild will be paying for that at a \$25,000 value. On the other side of the wall from the fitness equipment is a blue tiled area meant to have group fitness classes. The city could program classes for that area, or it could opportunities for residents to use that space. This equipment is designed to be used 365 days a year. Staff have taken two steps towards exploring this grant. Genter met with someone from the National Fitness Campaign that runs this program and their group from the campaign did some site assessments in the city. They found that we have two sites that score above 90 in their scale which qualifies us for the program. The two sites were Huset Park and Sullivan Lake Park. They used motion maps to hep determine the most movement within the city. Sullivan Lake Park is the most popular walking spot, and the second trail is at Huset Park West. The busiest park year-round is Huset Park and attracts the most visitors total. Eisenbise asked how that data is tracked. Genter replied the group had done hundreds of these things and they probably use location apps or other software for occupancy. There is a cost associated with this grant. Staff will be bringing a proposal to the next city council work session. This is a rolling grant application, so it is beneficial to apply. Other cities receiving this grant are Robbinsdale, Wilmar, Brooklyn Center, and Minneapolis are receiving two of these fitness stations. He indicated the best way to research this is to search for The Fitness Court and watch the YouTube video. Gulley asked if the grant is for \$50,000. Genter stated that plus the \$25,000 for the artwork. Gulley asked what the total cost is. Genter replied it depends on what size court is received. The smaller court is approximately \$165,000 and the larger size \$210,000. Gulley asked if the grant was not received would the city still pursue the project. Genter stated that would be something to discuss but the grant makes this an attractive option. Cullen indicated this grant is a multi-year ongoing program. Genter indicated Blue Cross

Blue Sheild is the sponsor for two years for up to ten total courts. They award \$30,000 - \$50,000 depending on your score. With our higher scores at Huset or Sullivan Lake Parks we would receive the \$50,000. Marquez Simula stated that some cities have grant writers on staff. We are very fortunate to have Genter on staff and doesn't think we have ever applied for so many grants. She receives many grant notifications from our state elected officials. There are many grants that need to be applied for within six weeks or less. That often hurts smaller cities that do not have dedicated staff for put together the research and applications. She indicated the local officials know about these various funding opportunities and they also want to get them into their communities. Ostergaard knows of some grant opportunities and works in a nonprofit setting, so she understands the quick process. One thing that is essential in the application process is to have a plan in place. If and when the comprehensive park plan is in place it will be much easier to pull those grant applications together. She feels it is more critical to talk about this and pull together the plan so we can utilize more opportunities. If the plan details were accessible then Commission Members could apply for various grants without needing as much time from staff.

#### Park Improvement Discussion

Cullen indicated he was waiting on the new administrative staff person, Elizabeth, to help upload the park documents and email them to the Commission. He would like to take the document and look at it one section at a time. The Park Plan Preface and Introduction were handed out to the Commission Members. Cullen invited members to look over the two sections and draft their thoughts. At the next meeting the group can discuss the two sections. It is important to point out why a park plan is needed. It enables us to apply for grants and have structure in place. The group will look at the benefits of the Parks and Recreation Departments, and a park mission statement. Gulley indicated one way to approach the park planning would be to look at the hierarchy of needs within each park and she sees that safety is a top priority in the survey. Cullen indicated a lot of the survey results are valid today. Ostergaard replied the survey was very well done and asked when it was completed. Windschitl replied in 2022. Cullen replied that the bike/pedestrian survey was done within the last five years and the other document referenced is from 1996. Working on the Introduction section will include a classification system which many of the parks are still the same as in this document. An inventory is important to know what we have and work on future improvements. The data analysis component is taking a look at the inventory and rating the amenities; are they passed their prime or is the feature even needed. One of the purposes of a park board or commission is to determine if what the city is offering aligning with the community, has anything changed? The analysis section would be which direction do we want to go and what is the overall plan. Then comes the strategies and how to pay for the process.

Ostergaard asked if the 2040 Comprehensive Plan the park section, whatever the Commission does should align with the 2040 Plan, but how up to date is some of the park information. Was the verbiage taken from the 1996 document or was it recreated. Marquez Simula indicated the 2040 Plan began in 2018 and was completed in 2020, so there is some old and some new verbiage. Cullen stated during the upcoming city events there is an opportunity for Commission Members to conduct community outreach and start asking what people are looking for. Gulley replied there are online surveys, but she still feels the clipboard paper survey is a great way to engage in a conversation with people. Cullen replied they are all great ideas. Ostergaard indicated having something available for the community to react to would be more useful than just gathering ideas on a whiteboard. It would be nice to have feedback on something the Commission is presenting versus just open questions. Saefke replied that also happens during the park planning process. For example, when the splash pad was being designed there was a community open house where the public was picking which features they wanted to see at the splash pad area. Windschitl indicated that a process was done at Keyes Park with the neighborhood to see what features they did or did not want within the park. Ostergaard stated this year the two pieces that might become the focus are the introduction piece and needs assessment piece. She stated this project is huge and for

this group to update the plan in a year is not realistic. Cullen replied this 1996 document was put together by an intern. If the commission digests this slowly and takes it one section at a time it will be less intimidating. Saefke mentioned Windschitl indicated at the last meeting when the parks were initially developed and built there were four quadrants of the city, and the goal was to have a ballfield in each one and have playground in multiple neighborhoods. Now the focus has changed for our small city to think about using the amenities in a spot that will be the most beneficial to as many people as possible. This is a completely different viewpoint than what the discussion has been in the past eighteen years that she has been working here.

Ostergaard asked what the next step is. Should the group establish a point person to continue to drive this forward, do staff drive this process. How do we keep things moving forward. At the next meeting we should have a portion of it as a work session. Cullen replied staff are here as a resource for the Commission and the driving does happen from the group as a whole. Defining the mission statement will be helpful. Ostergaard stated the roles have stayed the same but maybe some of the language needs to be updated to be with current times. Saefke replied staff have decided to continue this topic as a line item on the agenda moving forward so that there is dedicated time for discussion no matter if it is a few minutes or longer. The Park Improvement Discussion will be ongoing. Cullen replied he is available any time for Commission Members to reach out to him with questions or discussion in between meetings. Harzallah indicated there is a desire and need to move forward on the plan. He would like to see dedicated time each meeting on the agenda to discuss this so that it never goes away. This would be the first step. The next step would be on their own to identify how they can move forward based on experiences and research. He suggests attending meetings of other park boards or commissions in other cities. Eisenbise replied that anyone can attend other cities meetings that are open to the public. Cullen stated a future meeting could be a joint meeting with the sustainability committee but would suggest having a mission statement first. Gulley replied the YMCA has an excellent mission statement that speaks a lot about inclusivity and might provide some guidance to the group. Harzallah replied there is homework to do for sure.

### **New Business**

Windschitl indicated the fireworks for the 2024 Jamboree will be on Saturday, June 29, 2024. Attached to the packet are two different proposals from two companies the city has worked with previously. For multiple years the city has used J&M Displays and they have done a great job, they work well with staff, they are reliable, and they have incorporated into the proposal the 8% extra product if paid in advance, as well as a 15% extra product for their loyalty program. The other company, RES, offered a very good proposal as well. They do a lot of indoor fireworks shows. Staff have been happy with the current company from previous years. The two proposals are similar but slightly hard to decipher between the sizes and styles of the fireworks unless you are familiar with the products. Windschitl stated the rainout, backup date for the show would be Sunday, June 30.

Gulley asked if there were issues last year with the drought. Windschitl replied no there was not, and the fire department assured him they would handle the situation. He has received many compliments over the years on the fireworks from this company. This would be the opportunity to change companies if someone was not happy with the current show. As far as staff working with this company it has been a very good relationship with J&M Displays. Harzallah asked if drums are used to shoot off the fireworks. Windschitl replied no it is all computerized. Ostergaard asked why the Commission is getting an opinion on this and not other things. Is it a decision that is made historically on this. Windschitl replied that for many years he had brought this to the Commission. The cost for the fireworks show is in his budget and he budgets \$8,000 for the show. Ostergaard asked if the question is whether or not this keeps happening or if it is to approve this budget item. Windschitl indicated the budget is already set and we are trying to select the preferred company. He likes to get input from the Commission and what they hear from residents. Eisenbise stated she prefers to use local companies but is

happy to stay with the same company due to positive experience. Windschitl replied J&M Displays has multiple locations throughout the country and the one in Minnesota is in the St. Cloud area. They have changed headquarter locations over the years as they have grown. Harzallah asked if there are any issues with the environmental impact. Windschitl replied not really. Public Works does a great job cleaning up the park after the event and getting any debris left in the field. Cullen replied there is a Toro lawn sweeper that they take across the field in one day. Macko indicated J&M Displays has done a fantastic job and doesn't see a reason to change a good thing.

**Motion** by Macko, second by Gulley, to approve the fireworks proposal from J&M Displays. Upon vote: All ayes.  
**Motion Carried.**

## **Reports**

### **A. Recreation Director**

Windschitl wanted to thank Greenhalgh for over 22 years on the Commission. That is a great dedication to the city and to the Park and Recreation Departments and Commission. We appreciate everything he has done for us and will miss him. Greenhalgh said thank you.

Windschitl reported the air conditioner was repaired this week. Freon was added and seems to be working correctly. The City awarded the HVAC maintenance contract to a new company which is a good thing. The representative who works with our facility has done a lot of work for us in the past with other companies.

Windschitl reminded the Commission that the previous after school grant in partnership with the school district was denied. In recent weeks they were informed of a new grant opportunity within that program. It had a very quick turnaround and staff worked with the school district to submit an application last week for this new grant at just under \$500,000. The city would receive around \$100,000 with recreation receiving \$85,000 and the library receiving \$15,000. This would be applied towards a lot of our programs that are offered at little to no costs to the participants. A lot of the enrichment programs and summer programming would be funded out of this grant.

Windschitl mentioned the Recreation Department is hosting an open house on Friday, May 17<sup>th</sup> from 5:30-7:30pm outside in Huset Park. There will be activities, games, and inflatables. This event is free. If any Commission Members want to be involved they can let staff know.

### **B. Public Works Director**

Cullen reported a contractor has been pruning trees around Sullivan Lake Park. Without snow staff have had the opportunity to go through all the parks and cut branches and limbs. If people are seeing branches lying around that is because there is only one chipper so it will take time for staff to go back through and process all of the cuttings, buckthorn control and things like that. Gulley replied this is so nice to get these things done ahead of schedule. Cullen replied yes and it has also given the streets department the opportunity to get ahead of pothole season too.

### **C. Commission Members**

Eisenbise asked about the expense for a vehicle air pack unit. Cullen replied that is \$24,000 to replace an old mobile welding unit on a truck. It is used when there is equipment breakdown in the field. This air pack unit is three separate pieces of equipment in one. With the transition to EV vehicles this piece of equipment will allow staff to jumpstart or charge the vehicle mobility. There is also an air compressor and mobile welder on the unit. Eisenbise asked how many E-vehicles are in the city. Cullen replied there are a few in various departments;

engineering, the city manager, the police captain, and there are some hybrid vehicles in the police department. He sees the city having more of them in the future. Harzallah asked if the recreation department has one. Windschitl replied no. There has been a van on order for a few years and now there is a recall on the rear backup camera so they will not release the vehicle. The representative told him there have been a lot of issues with equipment built during the covid timeframe. He hopes to have the van before summer.

Ostergaard asked if there is any update on the Public Works building. Cullen replied no update. Staff are waiting to hear back on the grant application.

Eisenbise asked about the timing of the babysitting class because it is overlapping with another recreation outing. Windschitl replied this class was being offered in partnership with the school district. The ski trip is a rescheduled trip due to poor weather conditions on the originally scheduled date. This was the only other date with the kids off school that would work to ski again. Otherwise, we typically do not overlap programs. Eisenbise asked if a safety camp would be offered this year. Windschitl replied there has been one in the past with multiple departments taking part in the day camp. The participation numbers were decreasing each year, so it has been a few years since the last one. Staff can certainly look into offering one again. Eisenbise added an internet safety component would be appreciated.

Marquez Simula invited people to attend the CoHi Con on Saturday, March 2<sup>nd</sup>. There are vendors, artists, food trucks, video games, board games, and a craft room. This is held at Murzyn Hall from 10am – 12am. It is a family friendly event, at 6pm is a cosplay costume contest, then at 7pm it is a 21+ event with a Lions Club bar and karaoke. There will be 43 vendor tables in the main hall. Kids under 6 are free, ages 6-12 are \$10, adults are \$20 in advance or \$25 at the door. Last year there were around 350 people. It is a very cross generational event with a chill crowd.

Greenhalgh adjourned the meeting at 7:08 pm.  
Deanna Saefke, Recreation Secretary