



Park & Recreation Commission Minutes of the Meeting
Shared Vision Room, City Hall 3989 Central Ave NE
June 26, 2024

Call to Order/Roll Call

Andrew Macko called the meeting to order at 6:00 pm

Members present: Teresa Eisenbise, Andrew Macko, Avery Metzger, Priscilla Perez Umphress

Staff present: David Cullen, Public Works Interim Director; Deanna Saefke, Recreation Secretary; Justice Spriggs, Council Representative; Liam Getner, Urban Forestry Specialist

Community Forum

Resident Nikki Wakal lives near 40th Street and Washington Street and sees people walking dogs twelve to twenty times a day. She knows there are dog parks in Fridley and in Minneapolis near Columbia Park and says that Columbia Heights needs one too. The other dog parks are busy and there is so much activity from residents with dogs that having a dog park in our city is needed. Wakal indicated Gauvitte Park would be a good location for a dog park with long running lanes where dogs could get exercise. It would just need fences to create the runs. The other suggestion is Huset Park East by the southeast corner or even where the sand volleyball court is. There are already so many dogs off leash in Huset Park. She would like to see a small and large dog area. Wakal stated that dog parents have money and are willing to spend it on their pets so if there is a fee associated with the use of the park that is fine. She indicated that a dog park can be whatever the residents want it to be; if the number of dogs needs to be limited, if there is a daily or annual usage fee, and if there isn't a water source that is okay too. Within the parks she would also like to see more drinking fountains and bathrooms.

Wakal reported that residents would like to see more activities in the parks for youth. They should have opportunities to be kept busy. The Huset Park basketball courts are in bad shape and more courts are needed in the city. She would like to see a skate park to help promote positive behavior. Getting a soccer field at Huset Park would be cheaper than another splash pad. Wakal would like to see combined programs with the city parks and recreation departments. Some suggestions for types of programs to offer would be go out to a park with the Urban Forestry Specialist or an arborist to hold a discussion, bird watching, offer a time to have musical instruments in the park, and a paint at the park.

Macko gave a brief recap of the items Wakal discussed. Wakal thanked the Commission for their time and allowing her to discuss her ideas. She added that more parking spots are needed for McKenna Park. Saefke replied that has been discussed in previous meetings and is in the master park plan for McKenna Park. She added that most of the city parks are neighborhood parks and were not built with parking in mind. Cullen replied there is a soccer field at Huset Park and nets would be put out at the end of summer and beginning of fall for the recreation programs. Getner replied that Edgemoor Park is a small park but still mighty and has many trees along with the Heights NEXT garden.

Consent Agenda

Eisenbise asked if the budget for staffing was sufficient. Cullen replied that the parks are looking really good this year due to having enough seasonals. They have been able to keep up on the mowing and trimming around all parks and city buildings. The department still has two open full-time positions for streets and utilities.

Eisenbise asked what the line item is for Rents and Leases. Saefke replied that would be for things like renting equipment, or something that was needed long term but in a temporary situation. She explained that it is not the revenue taken in for Murzyn Hall rentals.

Motion by Eisenbise, second by Perez Umphress, to approve the consent agenda. Upon vote: All ayes. **Motion Carried.**

Letters and Requests

None at this time.

Old Business

Getner introduced an opportunity for the Commission Members to assist in obtaining donations to help fund the fitness court for Sullivan Lake Park. Staff are still waiting to hear a response from the DNR grant application for the funding to remove the existing tennis courts. Getner reported the fitness court with artwork on one side of the wall would be installed in 2025. He played a video showing what the fitness court looks like in other states.

Fitness video presentation:

We're changing the way America thinks about fitness with 200 fitness courts open, our campaign is growing from college campuses to city parks and trails. We're bringing free fitness everywhere and we're just getting started.

Hi, I'm Mitch Managet, founder of the National Fitness Campaign that was founded in 1979 when we opened the First Fitness court, redesigned for the 21st century. The fitness court is the world's best outdoor gym. Our seven movement, 7-minute system allows you to use your own body weight to get the perfect workout. Easy or hard. This will work for you.

Our goal is to build healthy communities by making outdoor fitness an essential part of people's lives, so that each day is better than the last. Now more than ever before, it is vital that we move fitness outdoors to remain safe, healthy and strong Michiganders. As soon as we can, we go outside, which is one of the reasons why the Fitness court was such an attraction to us.

What impressed us most was their basic philosophy that they want to provide world class fitness for free. That truly anyone can use no matter what your age is, no matter what your physical fitness level is, no matter what your skills are, it is very adaptable. Thousands of certified ambassadors will be trained to deliver classes, challenges and clinics as part of our national fitness campaign. New programs are bringing students outdoors across America. The fitness court mobile app is your gateway to enroll in these programs. Simply scan the new digital wall with your phone to access the library of free workouts designed to optimize your experience on the fitness court. Learn the moves and take challenges as we dig deep to create impact for our partners across America.

This year, we are thrilled to introduce fitness court public art. Cities have the opportunity to select a local artist to design their Fitness Corp using the power of the arts and fitness outdoors in iconic public spaces. We're proud to have helped cities of all sizes raise millions of dollars from respected sponsors to support free fitness. Wherever fitness is a priority, you can find a fitness building beyond 200 cities and colleges were partnering with large cities using urban movement data to map the best locations for healthy infrastructure. We're bringing fitness courts to within 10 minutes of population centers everywhere. They provide these wrap around services that from a city's perspective, that's what you want in a partner like this, you want it to come presented to you on a silver platter with a bow tied around it.

Getner indicated the city is creating donation opportunities and would like to receive help from the Commission Members to solicit donors. Staff are looking for connections and ideas that the members have on who to approach for this opportunity to sponsor the fitness court. There will be various tiers of donations and any donation amount is acceptable. Getner reported the concrete slab that the fitness court is built upon is approximately \$80,000. Sulmaan Khan, the City Engineer, has reached out to one of our concrete suppliers to see if they would be interested in donating. Cullen reported the city of Shakopee got all of their concrete donated for this project. Getner is asking for members to give ideas for organizations to reach out to for donations. Staff will do the work to put together a letter of request and also reach out to organizations if desired. On the finished wall of the fitness court there will be a list of donors and even a special tile just for the concrete if that is donated. Staff will invite the donors to view the National Fitness Campaign (NFC) website.

Macko asked how the artwork design and artist will be determined. Getner replied the NFC is very helpful and lays out the process for artist submissions and what is best for the community. Blue Cross Blue Sheild also has a list of artists to choose from or we have the option to find one on our own and put a call out for local artists. Eisenbise asked if the artist would get paid through the grant. Getner replied there is a stipend through the grant to pay the artist. He indicated staff will be send out a synopsis and script to commission members so they can reach out directly to potential donors on their own if they wish. Eisenbise asked if there is a lot of maintenance, or costs associated with the upkeep of the sports court. Getner replied there is a long track record of these sport court facilities throughout the US in various weather conditions. The maintenance is low, you can keep it clean with pressure washing, and the modular pieces can be replaced easily if they are damaged.

New Business

None at this time.

Reports

A. Recreation Director

Saefke reported the summer park programs are going very well. The number of participants is higher than last year. Most of the staff are returning from last year and we are very fortunate to have such wonderful and experienced people. Katie Holznagel is doing a great job running the program; adding new classes as staff are hired and improving the curriculum of previous programs. Youth T-Ball and Squirts Baseball just began practicing. The Active Agers program just took an overnight trip to southern Minnesota to a world war museum and stayed overnight at a casino. The Coordinator Lack has a very good number of participants for all of her programs. Adult softball is currently running on Thursday and Friday evenings. The wood floor of Murzyn Hall was sanded and refinished in May.

B. Public Works Director

Cullen reported the department is in a really good position regarding staffing. There are a few decisions waiting to be filled. With all of the rain some of the grass cutting has been delayed. Staff have been very busy preparing and setting up for the city Jamboree Festival. He stated two pieces of equipment have been acquired for the switch and go truck, and they replaced the aerial tree trimming component.

C. Commission Members

Councilmember Spriggs indicated that he has been learning about the Blue Zones Project in Albert Lea, MN. This is a well-being initiative that helps make healthy choices easier for the community. He plans to learn more about this initiative and report back to the City Council.

Motion by Eisenbise, second by Perez Umphress, to adjourn the meeting. Upon vote: All ayes. **Motion Carried.**

Macko adjourned the meeting at 7:00 pm.
Deanna Saefke, Recreation Secretary