



Park & Recreation Commission Minutes of the Meeting
Shared Vision Room, City Hall 3989 Central Ave NE
April 24, 2024

Call to Order/Roll Call

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

Members present: Teresa Eisenbise, Taher Harzallah, Andrew Macko, Avery Metzger, Andrea Ostergaard, Priscilla Perez Umphress

Staff present: David Cullen, Public Works Interim Director; Keith Windschitl, Recreation Director; Deanna Saefke, Recreation Secretary; Justice Spriggs, Council Representative

Oath of Office

Teresa Eisenbise, Avery Metzger, and Priscilla Perez Umphress stated the oath of office.

Commission Members and staff introduced themselves and indicated how long they have been on the Commission and in Columbia Heights.

Annual Election of Commission Officers

Macko volunteered to continue as Chair. Macko nominated himself, Eisenbise second. All ayes, motion carried. Harzallah nominated Ostergaard as vice chair. He indicated she has been a committed member of the commission and is genuine about approaching change and taking steps to do what is necessary to develop our strategy as a Commission. Macko second. All ayes, motion carried.

Community Forum

None at this time.

Consent Agenda

Eisenbise corrected the adjournment of the meeting in March was not Greenhalgh but Macko. Saefke indicated she had noticed it and thanked Eisenbise.

Eisenbise asked regarding the Parks bills, other equipment a charge of \$1700 for other equipment. Cullen replied that he would look into where that code is allocated to.

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

Letters and Requests

Macko indicated there is a letter of request to waive the rental fee of the Event Wagon on September 21, 2024, for the Heights Next Pride Festival. Windschitl explained what the event wagon has inside of it and how it is reserved by residents or businesses in Columbia Heights. Eisenbise asked how much the reservation fee is. Windschitl replied \$75 whether it is for one weekday evening or a full weekend. This festival is asking for the \$75

fee to be waived for their event. He believes this was waived last year. The event is being held at Kordiak Park. Macko asked when it was used last year if everything came back inside the wagon with no damage or issues. Windschitl replied yes it was all in good condition. Macko does not see any issue waiving the fee.

Motion by Ostergaard, second by Eisenbise, to waive the rental fee for the Event Wagon on September 21, 2024, for the Heights Next Pride Festival. Upon vote: All ayes. **Motion Carried.**

Old Business

Cullen handed out a facility inventory list that parks staff worked on updating. This includes all the inventory within our city parks. This list was last updated in 1994. From the update the city had renamed Mathaire Park to Ramsdell Park which confused Cullen at first. This list also rates the condition of each park. He will include this updated list in the next agenda packet. Eisenbise asked if Sullivan wasn't a park when this was created, because it didn't show up on the playground section. Cullen replied the playground was installed when a grant was received through Game Time. Saefke replied Game Time had a matching grant and the city was able to install new playground equipment at Sullivan, McKenna, and Huset West Park. Ostergaard asked if there is a better way to organize all the information in a clearer structure. Eisenbise stated the McKenna Park wading pool is not to code. Cullen replied yes the two wading pools are grandfathered in to be able to be used each year. As long as the structures work and there isn't any major construction done on the pools they can be used. They are not ADA compliant. The pools are definitely at the end of their life and staff continue to fix and operate them until any fix becomes too great to change the guidelines of being grandfathered into use. Ostergaard asked if this is part of the discussion. During the process of updating the park plan we know the condition of these pools and should the group be making recommendations for the next step at this point or is that a later discussion. Cullen replied that process isn't needed until there is an updated parks master plan and how to incorporate that into the plan, that would be the time to bring that up. For example, at Huset Park, the splash pad was installed where a wading pool was. There are many factors that come into play when choosing a splash pad from the size to the way the water is processed and more. With the varying costs it is better to wait until there is a parks master plan. Ostergaard asked what that process looks like. Cullen replied there is a document that was done in 2008 and updated in 2014 and is something that Hansen will go over. Ostergaard asked what the difference is between the two park plan documents. Cullen replied that what we are working on now is a general overview. An overall view of what the purpose is within the city parks, and why we are doing what we are doing. The next document is drilling down into the master plans for each area. Right now, we are figuring out larger questions, a mission, and a purpose. It is a great time to reevaluate the needs of the community and how things are changing, and how do we adapt, those larger questions. Based on this it gets set as a recommendation for the master plan. Ostergaard asked who puts together the master plan. Cullen replied it is usually a private contractor. Macko asked if it is known how many people use the wading pools. He knows the splash pad is the hot ticket item compared to the wading pools. Ostergaard replied the McKenna wading pool is packed all the time. Saefke replied that leads to the question if another type of water feature is installed, where does that get placed; at McKenna or Ramsdell? What quadrant of the city do you want that in. Macko indicated it has been nice that the water features were spread out within the city. Kids who are younger get an opportunity to use the features in their areas without having their parents take them across the city to a different park.

Harzallah asked if the basketball rim at Gauvitte is still the old rusty hoop. Cullen replied yes. Eisenbise indicated there is one piece of equipment gone at Silver Lake Beach. There were two riding pieces, and one is gone. Cullen replied the spring portion of it was broken, he heard about a replacement for that, and it might actually be the charge on the bills that Eisenbise was asking about. Ostergaard indicated Huset Park playground equipment is graded at a one and that isn't correct. Saefke replied that could reflect the equipment at Huset East. Cullen added the West side of Huset was not there when this document was created.

Ostergaard asked what the Parochial site was referring to. Windschitl replied Immaculate school most likely. Ostergaard asked if the City runs any of the indoor facilities listed. Windschitl replied no and they could be removed from the facilities inventory list. Currently we are working together with the school district to cross promote our programs. The Recreation Coordinator has been working with Prodeo Academy to have them promote our programs.

Eisenbise asked if there is anyone on staff that works with graphics and could make a document like this easier to read and posted for the public. Windschitl replied there are two communications staff that can assist with that, and Saefke has put many things together as well. Harzallah asked if Ramsdell Park used to have a soccer field. Windschitl replied it used to have a small field where the softball field is, and it had a hockey rink too. Ostergaard indicated she spoke to the principal at Valley View, and they are in charge of that soccer field behind the school. Principal Kuhlman indicated he would unlock the soccer goals. Windschitl reported that many open greenspaces within the city are not going to be big enough for the fields that Coach Leon was asking for. Gauvitte used to have a good size open space and trees have been planted there. Behind Valley View and Columbia Academy is an old football field and would be a great option.

Ostergaard asked if staff need anything from the Commission in regard to looking at the inventory list or going out to the parks. Cullen replied they can give any suggestions but more than anything he wanted to get a jump on updating the list while he had available staff and extra time. He will put the information in another document. Members can feel free to give feedback or updates.

Ostergaard mentioned the previous discussion of forming a subcommittee and that she didn't get a chance to talk with Sara Ion. It doesn't seem like the Commission needs to go to that level since staff are taking on the creation of these documents.

Ostergaard asked if there were any updates on the grants that were submitted. Cullen replied staff are working on the fitness court and there are monthly check-ins that are milestones in the process, like location and funding. It will be at Sullivan. Staff should also hear back in the next week or two on the DNR Grant.

New Business

None at this time.

Reports

A. Recreation Director

Windschitl indicated the spring sports have begun. Adult softball leagues started, Men's league is on Thursday nights and Co-Ed is on Friday nights. The Co-Ed league was canceled last week because of the cold and it doesn't look like great weather for this week either. All of the HVAC units are working at Murzyn Hall right now. Next month we will put one coat of finish on the wood floor in the main hall. We're trying to maintain them to the best of our ability.

Windschitl reported the Beautification Committee is starting back up for the year, Saefke does a great job coordinating the committee to plant flowers in various parks around the city. She coordinates the ordering of the plants and works with the volunteers to do that. Ostergaard asked if anymore volunteers are needed. Saefke replied the group is good right now and will see if anyone needs help with the initial planting. We have been narrowing down the places where annuals are planted, and John Nordlund from Public Works as been a great asset. He takes care of the clock tower, pots along Central Avenue, the Gateway, and Huset Parkway. We constantly get compliments each year on how nice the city looks with all of the flowers. Windschitl indicated

Council Member Buesgens plants the pots at Murzyn Hall. Saefke indicated at some of the parks where we no longer have volunteers John Nordlund has planted perennials so we do not need as many volunteers. Windschitl reiterated that Nordlund has done a great job updating all of the flower gardens around the city. The garden plots on Reservoir Boulevard were staked today by himself and a part time JPM staff. There are 48 plots and all are currently rented. Most are residents of Columbia Heights and a few others from New Brighton. The Parks Department staff till the garden each year and turn on the water source. Ostergaard asked if there is any discussion on expanding the number of plots. Windschitl replied he spoke with Mary Tholkes who runs the garden on 40th and Quincy Street, but generally speaking we are good with the current number of plots on Reservoir. However if the city buys another lot that is unbuildable and has a water source there, that could be possible. Saefke replied it is typically the people who already have a plot on Reservoir that are asking for more, we do not have a big waitlist for plots.

Windschitl stated the Recreation Coordinator is hiring for summer staff for the rec park programs. There have been a lot of applications. The City Council had voted to increase the wages a little bit to stay consistent with other communities and since we did that the applicants have improved and we are able to maintain the good staff we have. The City and the School District were not successful in getting the after school grant. Staff will keep looking at other options for funding. There will be a great summer program but we will not have a lot of the extra subcontracted programs like last year. The Senior Active Agers program has great attendance and are doing a lot of different activities. They are even going on an overnight trip this summer. The program has really taken off in the last year.

B. Public Works Director

Cullen reported the Utilities Superintendent Position has been filled by Ben Lund who was in the engineering department. There are two open parks positions and are going through the process of interviews. There is one open streets position, a mechanics position within the next month and unfortunately the public works administrative assistant took another position in another city. Regular routine work is happening as weather allows like tilling the garden and preparing athletic fields.

C. Commission Members

Eisenbise reported she attended the City Services Expo with Commission Member Dayna Gulley. There was a dry erase board with places to indicate a tally for amenities in the parks. A few things that people indicated were not enough skating rinks, not enough outdoor fitness areas, not enough soccer fields, and she showed a photo of the board.

Eisenbise noticed a discussion on social media regarding a three day art fair at Keyes Park and is wondering if staff are aware. Windschitl replied he spoke with staff and have rented the park for three days, there is no alcohol or loud music. The event will end earlier in the afternoon on Sunday. Saefke indicated festival groups in the past have used Sullivan or Kordiak Park but since Sullivan cannot be rented this year and the Kordiak shelter is under construction she suggested using Keyes park because it worked so well for Pets in the Park last year. Ostergaard asked if they are renting the building. Saefke responded yes, they will get a key for the building and store things in there overnight, and have access to the bathrooms.

Windschitl asked if there were any neighborhood comments on volleyball activity at McKenna Park, Sullivan, or Gauvitte Parks. Macko replied that he has not heard any concerns and usually gets people approaching him about various issues during the Jamboree. Windschitl indicated no permits were given to any group for volleyball. Staff did order additional biffs at McKenna Park for the resident that plays volleyball there. The resident does pay for the three biffs. The lights are not being turned on at the hockey rink either because some

of them are broken. He worked with the group to get people to park on the park side of the streets and not in front of the houses. It is a public park open to use and there is not a lot you can do about it unless there is illegal activity and then the police should be called. Ostergaard brought up the idea of having the group join the Adopt A Park program so there is more ownership in cleaning it. Windschitl replied the McKenna Park group does a pretty good job cleaning and there are many bags of trash waiting for pickup on Monday morning. Perez Umphress indicated she lives near McKenna Park and the trash has already been on the uprise especially on park side. Ostergaard indicated the playground, and the pool area does get kind of nasty on the weekend with the large amount of people. Cullen reported the Adopt A Park program was managed by the previous long term admin assistant and there weren't really any notes or ways of checking if the groups were cleaning. Some of the groups listed were no longer around or had no contact info. That is something that would need to be drafted and brought to the Commission to finalize. Saefke indicated St Timothy's cleans Sullivan Park three times per year. Windschitl indicated Immaculate Conception Schools clean Huset Park. Macko indicated the Lions Club clean along University. Ostergaard indicated the PTO at Valley View cleans Keyes Park frequently. She believes that launching the Adopt A Park program would reinvigorate groups to participate. Eisenbise stated there are many organizations that would like to see their name at a park for the program recognition.

Councilmember Spriggs indicated a resident attended the last council meeting and requested a dog park. He knows this is an ongoing discussion in the park planning process.

Harzallah asked if it is going to be clear to the Commission how much funds are available for park improvements. Cullen replied that isn't clear to anyone right now. Some of the funding comes through Park Dedication Funds through redevelopment in the city. Sullivan Park for example will be impacted by the sale of the old Medtronic Site.

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

Macko adjourned the meeting at 7:17 pm.
Deanna Saefke, Recreation Secretary