



Park & Recreation Commission Minutes of the Meeting
John P Murzyn Hall – Keyes Room, 530 Mill St
September 27, 2023

Call to Order/Roll Call

Tom Greenhalgh called the meeting to order at 5:34 pm

Members present: Teresa Eisenbise, Tom Greenhalgh, Taher Harzallah, Andrea Ostergaard, Nicole Peterson

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

Community Forum

Greenhalgh asked if anyone wanted to speak. No one was in attendance or came forward.

Consent Agenda

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

Letters and Requests

Letter of request from SACA Food Shelf for the rental of John P Murzyn Hall to be waived on Wednesday October 25, 2023, 4-7pm for the Empty Bowls Fundraiser.

Windschitl stated this is an annual fundraising event for the food shelf. Typically, the fee has been waived in the past. The building will be open that evening for other programming. The fee has been fully waived in the past because we are already open. Staff recommend waiving the fees completely because the facility is open, and this is a good benefit to the community.

Motion by Peterson, second by Ostergaard, to waive the rental fee of Murzyn Hall on Wednesday, October 25, 2023 for the SACA Empty Bowls Fundraiser. Upon vote: All ayes. **Motion Carried.**

Old Business

None at this time.

New Business

None at this time.

Reports

A. Recreation Director

Windschitl updated information on the denial for the 21st Century After School Grant that the recreation programs were operating under. He reported four people reviewed the application; three gave very high marks and recommended Columbia Heights to be funded, and one person gave a score of 55 and did not recommend. There are a few comments throughout the report if members want to review it, however Windschitl reported most remarks were positive. He indicated the comments reference the operating levy per pupil is one of the lowest in the metro area. With those numbers in the report the reviewers had to know how much that grant

funding would help the community. It is unfortunate the grant was not approved. Peterson asked if a negative reason was given. Windschitl replied the reviewer that gave a 55 score did not make a comment. Greenhalgh asked if we can reapply next year. Windschitl replied they have to wait and see what becomes available, but it would not be to the magnitude of the previous grant. Other options will be explored. Peterson said it is frustrating and should be a requirement of the reviewers to give a reason for a denial. Or the score should be weighted. Windschitl replied it could also come into consideration that we have had this grant for many years. There is only so much funding to be divided. Ostergaard asked how programming will be affected in general. Windschitl replied many of the free classes that were offered this past year will be cut. Examples include robotics, Young Rembrandt's classes, and the SkyHawks sports camps. Some of these programs had lower attendance numbers so the kids that did participate for free had a great opportunity. There are a couple of other funding sources available. One of them is in the Recreation budget where money was kept for after school programs and the summer park programs. We will still offer many of these programs but some of the fees might increase, plus there are scholarships available so families can still afford it. Windschitl as already heard of a few programs that the school district was offering that are no longer available and people were making comments. It is unfortunate for the whole community to not have this grant funding. Harzallah asked what the total amount was. Windschitl replied for our recreation programs \$70,000 annually or for the school year. The mainstream recreation programs will still be offered. There is funding available from previous programs that had a registration fee and received grant funding where revenue was generated. This revenue is required to be spent on similar programming, so it is available for some future programs.

Windschitl reported there are still a lot of issues with the power inside Murzyn Hall. It is an ongoing situation that is affecting the air conditioning unit. Xcel Energy has been monitoring the power for the previous two weeks. He met with the guy today and they also think the cause of the power surges is due to the HVAC unit. A lot of money has been put into this particular unit already this year and more is anticipated. Peterson asked if the unit needs to be replaced. Windschitl replied eventually but that is a lot of money. He indicated that this building is on the city council's radar as far as making some major improvements which would include HVAC and relocating a lot of the air handling units. So hopefully this can be repaired now for minimal costs.

Greenhalgh asked how fall sports were going. Windschitl replied fall soccer has started with good participation numbers. The fall girls softball program ended last week with three teams in the state tournament. The teams didn't place very well but they all had a good experience.

Eisenbise asked if it was one grant that we lost. Windschitl replied yes, the 21st Century grant. The school district will have a larger impact with the loss of this grant because they had a lot of programs offered through it and received the majority of the funding. A lot of the summer recreation programs were funded by this grant but yet there is funding in other areas that was kept from previous years. Windschitl wanted to have that revenue as a back up in case the grant wasn't always renewed. Now he has some funding for programs this year and will not need to go back to the city council asking for another \$60,000 to run programs. Greenhalgh asked if the grant was around \$280,000. Windschitl replied the recreation department received around \$60,000 each year and if the school district didn't use all of their portion, they would give more to the city. The City Library also received about \$10,000 from our portion of the grant for youth programming. For the latest grant application, the library was included as a partner so it is a loss to all three groups. Ostergaard replied it is a big hit to the school district, they lost three days of after school programming until 4:30 pm. Valley View gets out at 2:30 pm and kids were able to stay after school three days a week until 4pm. That is gone now. The Valley View PTO will be covering two days of afterschool care for 3rd through 5th graders. They can't offer it to all grades. She reported the Lieutenant Governor chose to visit Columbia Heights and was at Valley View. Hopefully this will help get some funding pushed our way.

B. Public Works Director

Cullen reported a vehicle accident at Prestemon Park on September 19th. A motorist had a medical event and crashed into the dugout and fence area of the ballfield. A tow truck had to come and get the SUV off the benches. They are working with the driver's insurance company and looking at fence replacement. Cullen indicated Prestemon Park also has three disc golf baskets. Staff were able to install them on the south side of the park. One staff person is an avid disc golf player and they helped to give their opinion on the placement of the baskets. Cullen reported there was also a loss of power at Prestemon Park. It was a break between two transfer boxes. Xcel Energy was able to repair the issue. At Huset Park west staff installed a new swing set with new foundations.

The City Hall donated outdoor furniture by Canvas was delivered and put in at the pocket park along Central Avenue. There was some slight damage to the pieces during shipment and Canvas will take care of those repairs.

Cullen reported there are currently three seasonal staff. One is finishing their employment in the next week or so. A few seasonal staff have stayed on to continue employment with the City. Harzallah complimented one of the seasonal staff workers taking down garbage in the trees and that he always sees him at Huset Park taking care of the area. He indicated all of the staff he comes into contact with in the parks are really nice.

Ostergaard asked what staff need to accomplish to ramp up for upcoming change in weather. Cullen replied that the first or second week of October staff will put on snow plow equipment or pull out vehicles used for snow removal to inspect them and get them ready for the season. If there are any parts that need repairs the staff will have time to complete that. Street sweeping is coming up; there isn't a hard date that the process occurs, but rather when 40% to 50% of the leaves have fallen. Street sweeping occurs twice in the City. Staff are finishing up with bituminous repairs, pothole filling, and milling to get as much done before winter. Cullen reported an early order of salt was taken into stock because the company it is ordered through was running out of storage. Greenhalgh asked how the newly placed pedestrian markers on Central Avenue will work with plowing. Cullen replied he is not sure that they are staying up. MNDOT is conducting a survey asking residents to give feedback on the posts. Ostergaard replied often those bump outposts are temporary in order to get people used to what might be a permanent curb line in the future.

Eisenbise thanked the streets department for the street sign. Cullen replied yes. Eisenbise stated there was only one sign in that area. Ostergaard asked since there is no longer a Traffic Commission, where should requests for signs or things like that be directed to. Cullen replied there is a Sustainability Commission now so they can be informed, or people can talk directly to Public Works staff or the engineering department.

Harzallah asked what the department does to prepare the parks for winter. Cullen replied the splash pad and pools have been winterized. The shade structures are taken down at Huset and LaBelle Parks. Aeration and overseeding will start in the parks as well. Greenhalgh commented on how dry Huset Park was before this recent rain. Cullen replied he is beginning to work with the MWMO for grant funding to use water from Zurek Pond in emergency or drought situations.

C. Commission Members

Harzallah proposed changing the commission meeting start time to a later time. Greenhalgh replied it was moved to 5:30 pm to help with staff timing. Eisenbise and Peterson had notes to discuss the start time as well. Peterson indicated a 5:45 pm start time would be better for her to make it on time. Windschitl replied a half an

hour is not a big deal to staff and if the members want to start at 6pm that can be done.

Motion by Harzallah, second by Peterson, to start the Park & Recreation Commission Meetings at 6:00 pm beginning next month. Upon vote: All ayes. **Motion Carried.**

Windschitl reported that during the recent division head meeting with the interim city manager they were discussing the frequency of meetings. Many times there are not a lot of things to discuss on an agenda and staff do not want to waste people's time meeting. Yes it is nice to discuss things but the agenda for tonight had one request. Eisenbise replied she was confused about the July meeting cancelation because she was under the impression it was to be a staff person and commission member decision to cancel. She spoke to a city council member and they said it is supposed to be a joint decision. Saefke replied that Eisenbise should verify with the city clerk on the policy but that has never been a directive. Having a meeting has always been based on what is on the agenda which is determined by Commission Members or staff placing items on the agenda. Windschitl replied if there are items we would certainly meet, but if there is nothing on the agenda he feels getting everyone together doesn't always make sense. Harzallah indicated the desire is to be more involved and he understands the rationale behind it, even if it is tedious. Ostergaard stated it is helpful to meet and doesn't seem like a month meeting is that hard of a touch point to get together and check in with everything. Missing a month feels like a long time; two feels very long. It would be interesting to think about how they can use these meetings to do some more strategy and for staff to utilize the expertise and knowledge of the members. She invited staff to openly ask the members to do more things, get out and canvas the area. Members have more to give and offer. Members could strategize and get organized to make sure at least one person is at every park event. Peterson indicated that was one reason she applied for the commission and wants to be more proactive in spearheading ideas. She likes the idea of driving some things forward. Cullen replied the city clerk is a great resource in how the meetings could be restructured or reordered. He will discuss options with the city clerk. Ostergaard indicated she would like to meet with Will Rottler to discuss more outreach and engagement opportunities or procedures. Harzallah asked if the staff are involved with other commissions. Staff replied no. Saefke indicated those roles are spread out to various staff.

Greenhalgh asked when the cyclocross race is happening. Cullen replied October 8th, he met with the organizers and they also attended a City Council meeting to promote the event.

Eisenbise added in regards to canceling a meeting she is concerned if a citizen is planning to attend the meeting and with having a community forum, she doesn't want the momentum to fizzle out if a meeting is canceled last minute. Peterson indicated if there is a shift to do more proactive work, there will be items to talk about. Windschitl stated whenever there is anything involving a fee structure he likes to have the Commission approve those requests to alleviate any potential situations of staff favoritism. He mentioned one other thing that has been done over the years is to tour the City Parks and give an overview of the plans. Members indicated they would like to tour the new city hall.

Eisenbise asked if the ice rinks will be open at Ostrander Park this year. Cullen replied yes, staff did some repairs and leveling off the ground. The park was built on swamp land and with the freezing of the ground it is a changing surface each season. Staff have discussed the use of the ice rinks and where are the best places to have them for the season. The tennis court at Sullivan is in disrepair; should it be removed. The ground heaves almost a foot so it doesn't pay to repair it each year. Harzallah indicated these are the types of things the commission should be discussing. Ostergaard stated one strategy could be to place a sign at the park asking if the tennis court should be removed and to contact the Commission. Eisenbise asked if the tennis court is in the master plan for Sullivan Park. Cullen replied there isn't a final master park plan for the entire city. There is a

funding question right now and you cannot make a park plan without answers to funding options. There are many questions like do you invest in all of the city parks or focus on one or two specific ones. Do you make one centralized park. Staff do not know what direction to take without available funding. Harzallah stated the park in Shoreview has everything in one place so it is easy to maintain. Saefke replied when it is full of people it is so easy to lose sight of your own child, it is so big. Cullen replied they built that park before many financial increases. Ostergaard replied the city of Shoreview has a tax base far beyond what we can compare with. Eisenbise asked if the biggest issue concerning a skate park is funding right now. Cullen replied yes and how it fits into the overall plan. Will it benefit the community as a whole or does it take away from amenities that could be at another location. Skateboards and the people who use them can be controversial. The concrete is very expensive to install and maintain. These are all questions for the public to answer. Eisenbise indicated the question is if Columbia Heights does want a skate park. Maybe she needs to send emails to the Tony Hawk foundation. Cullen said in the next year maybe he could set up a tour with the Shoreview Public Works to discuss their parks. Ostergaard said there was mention of who we are serving and asked who determines that. She lives by McKenna Park where they play volleyball every weekend and her family sometimes goes and watches. If there is a problem shouldn't we be supporting the solution like adding more garbage cans if there is a problem with trash. Cullen replied the city did conduct a survey. Windschitl replied there was a phone survey about three years ago. The results are on the city website.

Greenhalgh asked what the status is for open gym time at the Hylander Center. Windschitl replied it is currently being used for Recreation programmed activities. There are many different organizations that want to get into the gym. Even our Rec sponsored softball teams want to use the space. There are different nights of the week with programming. Monday nights is ladies basketball, Tuesday is open volleyball, Wednesday is family night for basketball, and Saturday is family futsal. There had previously been so many issues with problematic behaviors that staff wanted to see more structured times to control that yet still let families use the facility.

Greenhalgh adjourned the meeting at 6:31 pm.
Deanna Saefke, Recreation Secretary