



**Park & Recreation Commission Minutes of the Meeting**  
**John P Murzyn Hall - Senior Center, 530 Mill St**  
**August 23, 2023**

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**Call to Order/Roll Call**

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

Members present: Tom Greenhalgh, Dayna Gulley, Taher Harzallah, Andrew Macko, Nicole Peterson

Staff present: David Cullen, Public Works Interim Director; Keith Windschitl Recreation Director; Deanna Saefke, Recreation Secretary; Amada Marquez Simula, Council Representative

**Community Forum**

Greenhalgh asked if anyone wanted to speak. No one came forward.

**Consent Agenda**

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

Marquez Simula asked about the process with the previous minutes, in regard to the City Council passing an ordinance regarding dog waste cleanup and how does that information get reported to the public. Or is there a specific staff person to speak to. Saefke replied the Communications staff would get the word out to the public, or Public Works could post that information on their page in the city newsletter. Any communication for the city website that would be done through the Communications staff. Marquez Simula asked how information discussed during a meeting would be relayed to the Communications staff. Saefke replied when changes to policies are made and items are voted on during the City Council meetings that need to be publicized, either the City Council member would tell the Communications staff to get that to the public. Marquez Simula gave an example of being in a meeting with the Police Chief discussing winter parking and how does that get directed on social media. Windschitl replied staff would follow up on posting the rules on dog waste pickup. Marquez Simula replied she had spoken to Rottler about it and thanked Windschitl.

Harzallah mentioned at an earlier meeting regarding Park & Recreation Commission visibility or Recreation visibility and getting a table covering or paraphernalia to have at events. Cullen replied that is something that would go through Rottler. Saefke replied as people get more involved at events staff will look at ordering something. She would talk with Rottler and was under the impression that he was waiting for people to volunteer at events before ordering items. Windschitl invited the Commission to email the staff at any time with follow up items or minor items that do not need to wait for a meeting.

**Letters and Requests**

Letter of request for a Cyclocross Race to be held at Huset Park on a Saturday or Sunday in October. Emma Schultz introduced herself from the Versus Cyclocross Race Team. She explained cyclocross racing is on drop bar bikes mostly on the grass with obstacles around the course. Schultz had previously worked with the City Forester in her career and had visited a lot of the parks in Columbia Heights. Huset is a desirable spot for this type of event because it is surrounded by a community, families can easily attend, good parking, there is

power, opportunities to close the road off, ability to have food trucks, and other events during the race. Schultz handed out a map of a proposed racecourse. One of the features she likes the most about the park is the walkway bridge at Huset East. She explained the goal in cyclocross is to have a lot of hills, ups and downs, turns and twists along the course to keep it interesting and spread out the field. The volleyball court would be used as a sand trap. The route would continue to the west side of the park, using the bocce ball court, and then ideally run up the stairs near the recreation office. Ballfields would be avoided. They would stay off any areas that staff indicate. Racers complete as many loops as they can in a set time limit. There are several fields of participants throughout the day: beginner or novice, several different women's fields, men's, and juniors, and masters. Races run between thirty minutes and one hour depending on the level people are at. They are flexible within a few dates depending on availability of the park. Potential request dates are October 7, 8, 21, or 22.

Schultz provided a handout with a photo of a park used in St Louis Park for a race and a photo of the same area at a later date. To minimize damage if the grass is mowed at least one week ahead of time that will help minimize greasy spots for riders, help prevent wipeouts, and the damage to the turf. Often the turf will get packed down but that is not damaged and will pop back over time. The crew will go back over the course and provide gentle raking. Schultz is a forester, there is a certified arborist on the team, and several other environmentalists. They are happy to do whatever to make an event in Columbia Heights successful for the city, for the park and for the long term of the turf. Schultz added there is a new initiative from the Minnesota Cycling Federation that gives an extra boost of cash to help promote races. She would like to get a bounce house to encourage community members and families to show up and stay a while for the event.

Greenhalgh indicated Sundays would be the better day due to the recreation soccer programs. He asked if the area is sectioned off with strings. Schultz replied yes, they use metal stakes and stretchy flagging. An obstacle or two may be installed the day of the race. Gulley asked if there are a lot of injuries to the riders. Schultz replied the only time they tend to see injuries is a really packed novice. It has nothing to do with the course but the abilities of the riders and being too close together. It is not common. Gulley asked if the race will be on video. Schultz replied there will be some social media presence and they try to capture as much as they can to share. There are also a number of community photographers that like to show up at these events. Macko asked if they are full size bikes. Schultz replied it is a hybrid between mountain biking and road biking. Peterson appreciated all of the thought put into planning the course and being sensitive to the preservation of the park. Schultz replied yes, they love to create an event that everyone is happy with and provides opportunities for the future. Greenhalgh indicated the group will need to work with the police department for the closure of the street. Cullen appreciates the course will not be on the ballfields. One consideration that is weather dependent is the south side of the parking lot on Huset West where water can pool. Windschitl indicated there may be an event inside Murzyn Hall and would want to discuss the course area around the building. Schultz replied at any crossing of the street or driveways there will be someone staged there. Cullen stated the group will need to call in for locators if digging. Schultz replied that most likely they will not be digging but will talk with the promoters about that.

Windschitl indicated Sunday, October 8 will be the best date due to soccer programs. He indicated there will be soccer goals up on the east side of Huset Park that may impact their course design.

Greenhalgh asked what the fee will be for the park. Schultz knows the typical fee is for a four-hour rental time and this will be a full day event. They will have other large fees associated with the race. The promotions that do the timing will charge \$1000 or their time, there will be private insurance for the event, and other fees to run the event. It is standard to charge a race fee, the fee for this race is \$40. The main goal is to be doing something for the community and not to make money on the event. Marquez Simula asked if the event is free for

spectators. Schultz replied yes. Windschitl indicated the insurance policy should list the City of Columbia Heights as additional insured.

**Motion** by Macko, second by Gulley, to approve the use of Huset Park East and West on Sunday, October 8, 2023 for a one-day rental fee of \$300 and the group will provide insurance coverage listing the City of Columbia Heights as additional insured. Upon vote: All ayes. **Motion Carried.**

Letter of request for a reduced rental fee of Murzyn Hall on 09-22-23 from 5-10pm for an IQRAI'I Community Center banquet.

Windschitl stated this request is from a nonprofit 501-C3 organization. In the past we have set a rate for nonresident nonprofit organizations of a \$70 facility/entry fee and then \$60 per hour of facility use including setup, event, and cleanup. This request is for a Friday. Peterson clarified they are asking for a reduction of the normal rental fee. Windschitl replied yes. If they were to pay the normal rental fee of \$3025.86 unless they had a resident rent the hall at the discount of \$2269.40. Macko does not see this as an issue as long as all of their paperwork is verified. Windschitl replied the hourly rate covers our basic costs of operation. Greenhalgh likes the resident reduction. Harzallah replied the rates have been lenient in the past with groups. Windschitl commented that the organizer mentioned many of their members do live in Columbia Heights.

**Motion** by Harzallah, second by Macko, to approve the nonprofit nonresident rental rate of the \$70 facility/entry fee and \$60 per hour of use in the facility on Friday, September 22, 2023. Upon vote: All ayes. **Motion Carried.**

#### **Old Business**

None at this time.

#### **New Business**

None at this time.

#### **Reports**

##### **A. Recreation Director**

Windschitl reported the summer recreation programs ended last week. The participation numbers were very good this year for all of the park programs, the Wild Wednesday trips, and the theater programs. This year the two theater programs, Moonshoe Players and the Millstreet Players, utilized the Performing Arts Center at the school district. This was a nice partnership with the district. The school district often utilizes some of our gym space, so we do like to share facilities when possible.

Windschitl reported the recreation department did reapply with the school district for the after-school grant that we had been receiving for many years. He has been working in the city for almost 26 years and almost all of the years have been funded under some kind of grant. This current grant was shared with the majority of the funding going to the school district and another smaller portion going towards programming at the city library. This grant ends at the end of August. This next grant application was not awarded to us, which was kind of a shock. Staff will need to be creative with some of our funding for the next few years. Fortunately as far as the city rec programming is considered there are budget monies for some after school programs. However, we are not going to be able to offer so many free programs like the Skyhawks sports camps, the robotics, and art classes. These are very expensive programs that with the grant funding we were able to supplement the fees and bring the costs down for families to participate. The department will run the basic park programs and things that have run for many years. Gulley asked if an explanation was given as to why we were denied the

application. Windschitl replied no not yet but we should be receiving one in September. Gulley asked if there is an appeal process. Windschitl replied no, it is a very competitive grant.

Windschitl indicated the Murzyn Hall building is still experiencing HVAC problems. A lot of the equipment is well beyond its age. We are trying to maintain the current equipment. He feels some of the issues may be with the repetitive power surges within the building. The HVAC, fire alarm, and other electronics in the building have been having issues.

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

Cullen reported staff verified bike racks at McKenna Park by the playground, Sullivan Park by the north side parking lot, Ramsdell Park between the building and the wading pool, Keyes Park by the playground, Silver Lake Beach, Prestemon Park by the playground, LaBelle Park by the playground, there is one at the old city hall that can be moved somewhere else, Murzyn Hall has one by the lower level entrance, the library has one by the parking lot entrance, and there is one at the new City Hall. Potential places where one could be added would be at Huset Park near the splash pad and the Jefferson building. Saefke mentioned the turbine blades sculpture was also something mentioned in a previous meeting. Cullen replied that has been delivered to Public Works and it will be placed at the new City Hall. This outdoor furniture sculpture was received free due to sponsorships. Marquez Simula asked if he would take some unboxing pictures when they unwrap it. Cullen replied yes.

Cullen indicated new Ventrac equipment was received. He ordered pieces of equipment that the city had never owned. One is an aerator and soil cultivator. He has worked with the City Forester to test Biochar at Keyes Park. Biochar is an organic, carbon-based material that has been burned without oxygen. What it does is cut back on the use of fertilizers and other chemicals. It looks like ground up charcoal but has a lot of spaces in it for microbes to grow in it. It catches water and nutrients within the material. With this new aeration machine and soil cultivator, the goal is to get to the athletic fields with the Biochar to make them look better, greener and they will require less water. Staff are looking at areas where they can reduce the labor hours for mowing. In those areas they are planting bee lawn, clover, and no mow to reduce cutting grass. Gulley asked if the Biochar acts as a filler. Cullen replied this was found in the rain forest originally. It acts like a charcoal filter; it has the ability to collect and hold onto things. Staff mix the Biochar with a mulch compost mix. The process is charging the Biochar. Keyes Park was a test area where Biochar was used on the north field and not the south field. Marquez Simula commented this is creative and, in the future, maybe the Key Club or another group could help with a program to introduce the product to residents. Cullen replied that the most expensive part is the shipping of the Biochar from Michigan. Peterson reported that her previous boss wrote a lot about it and had known of the product for several years. Isn't there a local company. Cullen replied working with Wakefield has been the best price. He has spoken to them about expanding into this area. Peterson asked if they aerate and then surface apply the mixture. Cullen replied yes. Peterson indicated Biochar is used during the initial soil application when planting trees. Cullen replied the City Forester has done that when planting new trees.

#### **C. Commission Members**

Harzallah asked when the soccer field goals would be installed and where. Windschitl replied they will be installed in the next couple of weeks by the Public Works staff. There will be four different fields; 1st & 2<sup>nd</sup> Graders, 3<sup>rd</sup> & 4<sup>th</sup> Graders, 5<sup>th</sup> & 6<sup>th</sup> Graders, and the full size field will be on the west side of the park. There will be a little field and staff are figuring out the best placement for that because there is still girls softball in Huset 3. There will be four fields total. The full size field and a little field on the west side, and on the east side over by the volleyball area a smaller field and then a 7<sup>th</sup> & 8<sup>th</sup> Graders field. They all have different size goals. Harzallah asked if these will be permanent. Windschitl replied they will be for the Fall soccer season. Harzallah replied that he had two conversations with community members who have soccer practices here and they are frustrated

that there aren't any soccer goals after previous conversations. Windschitl replied soccer goals are placed within Huset Park every year for the recreation soccer programs. Immaculate Conception Schools also use the fields in the fall. Harzallah said there are practices at Huset Park on Saturdays and Thursdays. Windschitl replied once the recreation programs start those groups might not be able to use the fields. He is unaware of the multiple groups of people using the field. Greenhalgh asked if soccer was going to be programmed at Keyes Park. Windschitl replied it had not been there the past few years in order to get the turf in better condition after construction. Marquez Simula asked if the goals being installed at Huset Park will be there from now until the end of programming. Windschitl replied yes, they are anchored down and will be there typically through the end of October.

Marquez Simula reported the Monarch Festival was scheduled for tomorrow and has been canceled due to weather conditions. The heat index effects the volunteers, staff, and performers. The City has decided if the air quality is 150 city events would be canceled. She announced to save the date for September 23<sup>rd</sup> for the CH Pride Festival at Kordiak Park. Kordiak has damage to the shelter so that is fenced off. She reported if anyone knows of a resident in the area of Kordiak Park there is a community group Friends of Kordiak Park. They used to be very active in the 80's and 90's. The group recently met to discuss community involvement and connection with the County. Seventy-five people attended and discussed the water quality, question and answer with the county and other future improvements to the park. There is a Facebook group if people are interested.

Harzallah asked about the City Council considering a ban on smoking in the parks, including cigarettes, vaping, and weed. Greenhalgh replied there is no smoking at youth events. Marquez Simula replied there is a vote on the topic on Monday. She suggests coming to the City Council meeting. Harzallah fully supports a ban. Peterson asked how a ban like that would be enforced. Marquez Simula replied other users of the parks often feel more apt to say something to someone if there is a sign indicating a policy.

Greenhalgh adjourned the meeting at 6:43 pm.  
Deanna Saefke, Recreation Secretary