



Park & Recreation Commission Minutes of the Meeting
John P. Murzyn Hall – Senior Center, 530 Mill Street NE
November 17, 2021 - 5:30 pm

Tom Greenhalgh called the meeting to order at 5:41 p.m. and read the opening statement for remote meetings due to a health pandemic and declared emergency. He reported that the meeting could be conducted by a combination of in-person and electronic means.

Roll Call

Members present: Sean Clerkin, Brian Clerkin, Tom Greenhalgh, Becky Groseth, Rachel James, Nicole Peterson
Staff present: Keith Windschitl, Recreation Director; Deanna Saefke, Commission Secretary; Connie Buesgens, Council Representative

Also present: Amada Marquez-Simula

Approval Consent Agenda

Motion by S Clerkin, second by James, to approve the consent agenda. Upon vote: All ayes. **Motion Carried.**

Letters and Requests

3. Letter of requests for the annual Columbia Heights Fire and Ice Plunge fundraiser will take place on Jan 29, 2022 from 7am-3pm. They are asking for the fee to be waived.

Windschitl reported the Columbia Heights Fire and Ice Plunge had been going on for a number of years. In years past SACA has been involved with this fundraiser but they are not involved this year. The Columbia Heights Athletic Boosters, Columbia Heights Lions Club, and the Columbia Heights Firefighters are running the event. It is undetermined at this time as to where the proceeds from the event will be going to, but there has been talk about giving them to the Fridley Fire Chief that passed away. Saefke added that the family of the fire chief, Spencer, has a foundation in his memory and was told they do not have all of the paperwork approved as of yet to be a 501C3. That might be why the CH firefighters were hesitant to list where the funds are being given to for the plunge. Windschitl added the CH Fire and Ice Plunge committee is asking for the park rental fee to be waived. S Clerkin asked if there is a fee or cost occurred to the City by having this event. Windschitl replied he is unsure other than routine maintenance and clearing of regular areas. James replied in the past there were extra port-a-potties. Windschitl assumes that would be a cost passed back to the committee. He will look into the costs from the city perspective and let the Commission know.

Motion by James, second by Groseth, to waive the park rental fee for the Columbia Heights Fire and Ice Plunge on January 29, 2022. Upon vote: S Clerkin and B Clerkin abstain, All ayes. **Motion Carried.**

4. Letter of request from HeightsNEXT request to waive or reduce the rental fee for the Cheers For Beers event on Friday, May 13, 2022.

Amada Marquez Simula added to the letter of request that all monies raised from any HeightsNEXT event are spent in Columbia Heights as much as possible. All of the outreach is focused on our community. The HeightsNEXT activities attract people from outside of the city but all of the outreach is within Columbia Heights. S Clerkin asked what the rate is for the use of the hall for a nonprofit resident group. Saefke replied it is a \$60 facility fee and \$25 per hour of use.

Motion by S Clerkin, second by B Clerkin, to reduce the rental fee for the Cheers For Beers event on May 13, 2022 to the \$60 facility fee and \$25 per hour of use inside Murzyn Hall. Upon vote: All ayes. **Motion Carried.**

Old Business

Groseth asked if signs were posted at Sullivan Lake Park regarding no smoking trial in the park. Windschitl replied he will follow up on that with Hansen and report back to the Commission.

Peterson asked if communications were ever sent out to the community regarding the use of herbicides and pesticides. Windschitl replied he will follow up with Hansen on that. Saefke replied the winter city newsletter is being worked on currently and that topic would be better in the spring newsletter. Groseth replied that could be posted on the city website regardless of the season.

New Business

5. The Recreation Coordinator, Katie Holznagel, will give a review on the current and future plans for youth and adult programming.

Windschitl introduced Recreation Coordinator Katie Holznagel to give an overview of previous and upcoming programs offer through the department. Holznagel reported sixteen to twenty programs are currently being offered with full details in the City Newsletter. The programs in session are running smoothly, youth basketball teams are starting to form for boys, we were unable to form teams in girls basketball due to lack of participation, the rest of the programs have good attendance, and safe procedures are being followed with sanitizing and most participants wear masks.

Regarding COVID changes over the past two years Holznagel stated it is been important to continue community engagement. Many kids are dealing with social and emotional issues regarding COVID and although she is not equipped to help fully with that, she feels anyway that we can offer positivity is a plus. She implemented a lot of take home kits for youth and families with some virtual options. There was also a virtual bake-off for kids and adults to participate. During the past two summers there were a number of programs offered with good participation. Staff worked really well during the first summer of COVID with sanitizing, mask wearing, and keeping participants safe. This past summer the enrollment numbers were higher and the department participated in many 100 year Anniversary events.

Regarding staffing, Holznagel indicated many of the part time and seasonal staff are returning from previous summers. The current staff has been telling their friends to apply. S Clerkin stated the theater program has had busy and big numbers of participants. Holznagel reported difficulty in finding a dance instructor. She has been filling in teaching classes to keep the momentum and interest going. If gymnastics is able to start again we might need to find a new instructor as the previous one of many years has a new fulltime work schedule. One new staffing procedure Holznagel would like to utilize part-time staff throughout the whole year which is a change from the past and would involve a slight budgetary change. It would be beneficial to have high school or college staff working throughout the whole year because it is getting harder to rely on volunteers to coach sports teams. Sports in general are struggling throughout many cities with lack of participation. With that comes less parent volunteers and less people that are equipped to handle coaching youth. Holznagel added that puppet shows have been added at special events during the year and that is an increase from years past. There were two shows at Truck or Treat and the puppet wagon will be at Snow BLAST. She consistently receives positive feedback regarding the recreation programs and now has people reaching out to ask if specific programs or events like Snow BLAST are happening.

For adult programming, Holznagel shared Adult Yoga and Meditation and Zumba that are new. She would like to

offer more programs for adults and is looking into online programs such as organizing your home. Another demographic that is not being met is older teens and she is looking at offering a teen game night this summer. Electronic or E-Sports is another popular program but it is an expensive program and then there is a question as to how people participate if they do not have a gaming console.

Holznagel ended her report by inviting any feedback on programming and welcomes any ideas on activities the Commission would like to see offered in the future. James stated Katie is such an amazing gift to the community. She has kids that participate in various recreation programs. Regarding programs or activities for teens she suggests offering something that you can't easily do on your own, for example archery or snowshoeing. The teens that she knows don't need help organizing a ball game, but offering the equipment that they don't have access to, are activities they will jump at participating in. S Clerkin asked if pickleball is an older sport. He indicated a court is open on Columbia Parkway. Windschitl replied that program was offered at the Hylander Center in the mornings based on requests from adults to have it. There was a fair number of participation in the beginning but it tapered off. It was a short-lived offering.

Windschitl reported with regards to youth programming a lot of the funding is received through a federal grant along with the school district. The 21st Century After School Grant has been used for many years and this is the second of a three year extension in the amount of about \$50,000 to the Recreation Department. This grant allows us to try new things and offer various programs. In regards to the theater program, Lilly Vanner and Elizabeth Loper are the directors who were former students in the programs and now are running them. They are doing a great job with all of the theater programs and hopefully they stay with it for a while. Windschitl added over the previous two summers a lot of cities and community programs didn't offer summer programs. We ran our summer park programs with a lot of protocols in place to keep things clean and kids and staff healthy. Holznagel received a letter with photos from a parent that was extremely happy with the program and impressed with the staff interactions with their children. S Clerkin appreciates Holznagel and what she does for the City.

6. Staff will discuss proposed rental rates for John P Murzyn Hall in 2023.

Windschitl indicated the rates for Murzyn Hall rentals are discussed annually for two years in the future. The rates for 2022 were previously established and most Saturdays are already booked for 2022. As of the first business day of the new year we will start taking reservations for the following year; 2023. In the past few years the rates have increases slightly each year. Based on the amount of usage for this year and next year, and also the damages, the cleaning, and the upkeep of the facility Windschitl feels the rental rates could be increased more. S Clerkin added energy costs to run the facility will be increasing. Windschitl feels the rates should be increased for all days of the week. Currently the Friday or Sunday rate for a resident is \$850 which is very reasonable. The nonresident rate on those days is \$1134, on a Saturday for a nonresident is \$1801 and a resident is \$1351; rates rounded up. He indicated there isn't much advertising done for Murzyn Hall and is really word of mouth that people hear about us. The beauty of this facility is that you can bring in your own prepared food. If renters choose to cook onsite it has to be done by a licensed caterer with insurance listing the City of Columbia Heights as additional insured. In the past councilmembers have asked how we compare with other facilities and it is hard to do that because most other facilities do not let you bring your own food in. Many other facilities also get back a portion of the proceeds from the sale of each plate with a required caterer. The only fees required for a rental are the rental fee, the refundable damage deposit, and the security deposit that is applied towards the hours that the security officer works that evening. S Clerkin asked if a \$500 damage deposit is enough money to cover any extra costs. Windschitl replied yes.

At this time of the year staff discuss any rental policy changes to make this a better facility and run more smoothly. Staff would like to reduce the maximum capacity of people in attendance. Currently it is 375 and staff feels that makes the hall very busy. Although we don't count at the door, by reducing the capacity size staff feels it will reduce some of the wear and tear on the facility. S Clerkin asked if staff feel the amount of rentals will not be negatively affected if the capacity is lowered. Windschitl replied no. James suggested if a group wanted to have more than 300 people they could rent a room downstairs. Windschitl replied that is not a desired situation because it is very disconnected from the main hall area, it leads to potential problematic behavior downstairs in the hallways, and it is difficult for the one staff person and one security officer to control or monitor the facility. Saefke added the majority of event held in Murzyn Hall have fewer than 300 people. Peterson asked if it would make more sense to have an increased rental fee for groups over 300 people. Windschitl replied there would be more groups that would say they are less than 300 and then have more than that showing up on the day of. Saefke reported when people call one of the first points in a discussion is how many people they are expecting and if they have an expected guest list is more than what our capacity is the discussion ends.

Windschitl indicated another change in the policy that staff would like to make is for not only the alcohol service to end by midnight but also any music. That will establish a clear ending time for the events and allow enough time for everyone to be out of the facility at 1 am. The current policy allows music to end at 12:30 am. When the CH Lions Club is bartending there are never any issues with closing the bar down in time. Even when there is another licensed contractor conducting the bar service they can push the ending time because they are not familiar with our policies. The current policy indicates the bartending service must be contracted through the CH Lions Club if there are more than 275 guests. S Clerkin reported the last call for alcohol service during a Lions run bar is 11:30 so that they can stop serving completely by midnight. B Clerkin added they do not overserve or had out a tray of alcohol at the last call either. Their rule is to serve no more than two drinks per guest at one time. Windschitl stated the Lions Club bartenders go through alcohol training with our police department and the club had dram shop insurance. For these reasons of safety and control, staff would like to change the policy establishing any party with more than 200 people is required to use the CH Lions Club for bartending services. Windschitl added that a renter does have the option to write a letter of request to the Commission if they want to use a service other than the CH Lions Club for bartending.

James asked what percentage of an increase to the rental rates the staff would like to see for 2023. Windschitl replied the Commission is welcome to suggest other amounts; however he would like to see at least a \$100 increase to the rental rate on Sunday through Friday full Murzyn Hall rentals and an increase of \$200 on Saturdays. S Clerkin added from his own experience working in the bars that has been difficult for security officers and he feels that rate should be increased. Saefke replied it is being suggested for the Security Deposit to increase from \$200 up to \$250. She indicated the hourly rate for the officer is staying at \$35 per hour plus tax. The Security Deposit is applied towards the hours that the officer works an event and any unused amount of the deposit would be refunded back to the client. By increasing the deposit amount it offers more of a buffer for the events running a longer bar to cover the full cost of the officer's time which requires less money needed from the Damage Deposit prior to the refund being given.

Motion by S Clerkin, second by B Clerkin, to increase the rental rates of John P Murzyn Hall by \$100 on the Sunday through Friday full package rentals and by \$200 on Saturday rentals for 2023, and to increase the Security Deposit amount to \$250 on all new rentals. Upon vote: All ayes. **Motion Carried.**

Motion by B Clerkin, second by James, to increase the Security Deposit amount to \$250 effective immediately on all new rentals. Upon vote: All ayes. **Motion Carried.**

Motion by Peterson, second by B Clerkin, to change the maximum capacity for events inside Murzyn Hall to 300 people, effective on all new rentals. Upon vote: All ayes. **Motion Carried.**

Motion by James, second by B Clerkin, to close the alcohol service and end all music by 12:00 am effective immediately on all John P Murzyn Hall rentals. Upon vote: All ayes. **Motion Carried.**

Motion by Groseth, second by James, to require the bar service inside Murzyn Hall to be conducted by the Columbia Heights Lions Club if the event guest count is over 200 people, effective on any new rentals. Upon vote: S Clerkin and B Clerkin abstain, All ayes. **Motion Carried.**

Reports

A. Recreation Director

Windschitl reported the City Council authorized the replacement of one of the recreation vans. The van was purchased in 1998 and doesn't have a lot of miles but the frame is very rusty. It was budgeted two years in a row for vehicle replacement. One vehicle being replaced was the mini bus used mostly for senior outings. This was replaced with a transit van. The vans are used for youth trips and athletic teams playing in other cities. The city council authorized the purchase of a new vehicle for approximately 46,000.

Windschitl pointed out the expenses of the HVAC on the reports mentioning the increased costs. The HVAC equipment is outdated and the controls need consistent updating.

B. Public Works Director/City Engineer

Windschitl reported the City has decided to conduct a building study for John P Murzyn Hall. This will have a company come into the building and assess what needs to be done to bring the conditions up to the proper standards, is it worth repairing, and look at the exterior and interior conditions. This will include the HVAC units, the roof, the outside walls, water leaks, and many other items. There are three companies giving costs analysis. Hansen is in charge of that initial step and then Windschitl will be brought into the process.

Greenhalgh asked if it is worth putting money into the building. Windschitl replied that is a question for these companies conducting the cost analysis. The building was originally built in the 1930s and added onto in 1985. Buesgens added the facility holds a lot of sentimental value to the community but that it also needs to hold up for future needs. Windschitl added that the reservations for the hall are booked out a year and a half in advance, so as of the first business day of the new year the bookings open up for the following year. He recognized there are a lot of little things within the building that will need further adjustments like making the restrooms ADA accessible is one project but then it will either cut down on the number of stalls or need to be expanded. He also agrees that the building has a lot of value to the residents. Windschitl added staff works hard at trying to keep the building up and fix problems as they arrive but it is becoming increasingly difficult and more expensive to make the repairs.

Windschitl reported the security cameras are being installed in the parks, inside, and outside of Murzyn Hall. There are now cameras in the parking lot and out on the corners of this building. The active park areas are getting cameras as well. The money for the cameras came from mostly the police and parks budgets. Greenhalgh asked who would have access to monitor the cameras. Windschitl replied he is unsure if he will get access but the police will have access for sure.

C. Commission Members

Buesgens reported the City Council approved a professional survey to be conducted in January with residents. A lot of the subject will focus on the improvements in the parks and at Murzyn Hall. Each department will have four or five questions. The company will randomly pick 400 people in the City with balanced demographics. There will also be options for people not chosen to take the survey to offer feedback on what they would like to see for improvements within the parks and programming regarding community usage of Murzyn Hall. Buesgens is excited to get community input. This survey had the full support from the city council.

Groseth indicated she would like to see consideration to continue offering meetings via Zoom. She feels the pandemic numbers warrant that capability, but also it allows for more equity to reach a great number of people. Groseth prefers to meet in person but wants to see opportunities for more people to participate. James added that attendance via Zoom should either be allowable or not allowable no matter what the personal reason is for the attendee. S Clerkin agreed. Marquez-Simula reported similar discussions and concerns have been brought up in other commissions. Buesgens replied she will follow up on the open meeting laws with the City Manager.

Peterson informed the Commission she part of a design competition for park benches and her team won. She would like to donate the custom designed park bench.

Marquez-Simula presented a letter of concern from a resident. This resident is concerned with potential drowning hazards at the open water areas in our city. Specifically, she mentions the ponds that are near the parks and playground areas. In the resident form she indicates the actions she would like to see the city take are warning signs, fencing around open water located close to playgrounds, creating any new playgrounds that are designed with inclusivity in mind including fencing. She would like to see neurodevelopmental disabilities included when designing accessible playgrounds. The Commission thanked Marquez-Simula for reading the letter. Windschitl replied that will be brought to Hansen's attention and added to a future Commission meeting.

Greenhalgh suggested if a meeting is required in December to meet on the 15th instead of the fourth Wednesday due to the holiday week.

Greenhalgh adjourned the meeting at 7:04 pm.
Deanna Saefke, Recreation Secretary