



Park & Recreation Commission Minutes of the Meeting
Sullivan Lake Park, 721 51st Ave NE
August 28, 2024

Call to Order/Roll Call

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

Oath of Office taken by Commission Member Brian Timm

Members present: Teresa Eisenbise, Taher Harzallah, Andrew Macko, Andrea Ostergaard, Priscilla Perez Umphress, Brian Timm

Staff present: Kevin Hansen, Public Works Director; Keith Windschitl, Recreation Director; Deanna Saefke, Recreation Secretary; Amada Marquez Simula, Council Representative

Community Forum

None at this time.

Consent Agenda

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

Letters and Requests

None at this time.

Old Business

Macko directed the Commission to review the mission statement examples on page 25. Hansen stated during the previous Park & Recreation Commission meeting the members were asking what they could be working on and what the agenda looks like moving forward. When talking about improving our park system the first step from a staff perspective is to update the Park System Plan. Staff will bring updated segments forward to the Commission for review and comments. Ultimately there will be an updated system plan that would be brought to the city council.

Hansen indicated the next step for the group would be to go through and look at a Park Improvement Plan. This is a consultant led project that is highly involved from the community perspective. There is a lot of community input during the process. Staff doesn't have the ability to go through park by park and lead those types of meetings. We would want to find out from the community and update the master plans for each park, or create one where needed, on a park-by-park basis. In 2023 a cursory update was done on all of the fifteen parks and what the costs at that time would be for the improvements. It was around fifteen million. At this point in time, to move forward in that direction, this should be a consultant led project working with the Commission and really engaging the public. This would be after the system plan is updated so we are looking at 2025-2026. There would then be master plans for all of our parks and also be able to detail the costs. Staff would then go back to the city council and work with them to figure out funding scenarios. The city council is the only one who has

authority to provide funding for any level of park improvements. Previously through the strategic planning with the city council, this is done every two or three years, staff have brought up the idea of updating the parks and bringing the conditions up to a certain level. They have discussed scenarios for funding that. Hansen indicated there is not a lot of grant funding available for this type of project on a local level. Without other funding options, one of the best options to raise revenue will be bonding over time. The Park and Recreation Commission will recommend improvements to the city council. Staff will bring the park system plan to the commission at the next meeting. In early 2025 the goal will be to have the final plan updated and then from that go to an implementation plan. That is something a consultant will need to be hired for; largely to create the master plans but also to work with the commission to engage the community on a park-by-park basis. This can be a twelve to eighteen month process. Two cities that recently went through this process were Fridley and Coon Rapids. They also sold bonds for that. Fridley had a 30 million investment in their park system, of that 20 million was through bonds. Coon Rapids had an equivalent amount and a few years prior to Fridley.

Hansen stated that prior to considering any improvements to our park system the first step will be updating the mission statement from 1996. He presented samples of what some other park and recreation bodies have for mission statements. At this meeting or by the next meeting, the commission should decide what they would like to see in an updated mission statement. Mission statements can provide the overarching or guiding principle for the things the group does as it relates to park and recreation in the community. The mission statements begin on page 26 of the agenda packet. The first sentence of the current statement; The purpose of this plan is to ensure that all parks and open areas remain clean, safe, accessible to all, and up to-date to best serve the residents as well as improving the quality of life in Columbia Heights. Hansen feels this is important to think about what parks do in a community, it really relates a quality of life in that community. Hansen read the remaining mission statement; To ensure that this mission be carried out to its fullest extent, we recognize that a support network from various sources must be directly involved in the planning and decision making processes. We recognize that working with other departments such as the Recreation Department, Parks Department, Public Works and Engineering Departments along with citizen participation through community groups and other organizations are necessary and will help lead to the successful implementation of this plan. He indicated this is somewhat wordy and out of date. Most park and recreation groups have a mission statement. The City has a mission statement that is read at the beginning of every meeting. These statements are concise and only a paragraph or two.

Ostergaard asked if the statement should be inclusive of the Commission and the Parks and Recreation Department but not Public Works. Saefke responded that in our city the parks department is under the Public Works. Hansen added that under Public Works is park maintenance, and park development. Macko likes bringing up the fact that we try to offer a variety of things to do outside. He wants to express the opportunities we provide to the public in the statement. Perez Umphress replied a diverse recreation and cultural opportunities for people of all ages. Macko liked that statement. Perez Umphress indicated it is from the Greenfield Recreation statement. Hansen replied from a staff perspective they really liked the Greenfield mission because in a brief statement it really captures recreational and parks but is still representative of Columbia Heights with the diversity and varied culture. Ostergaard indicated liking the Greenfield mission but feels it is missing something regarding nature and sustainability. There is a line in the Edina mission about environmentally sustainable practices and there are good efforts out there for that. If it is something that we as a community are striving for that is good to have in a mission. Windschitl indicated the Minneapolis statement talks about plants and wildlife. Perez Umphress stated with her work she uses Chat GPT often and is wondering if that would be a good tool to use to create a new mission statement. Hansen replied that some of the notes he has written from this discussion is to include varying in different recreation opportunities, Greenville diversity and representing different cultures of the community, nature, sustainable, and to make sure to have

accessibility and inclusivity. He stated Chat GTP is a tool that staff use also. The Commission can think about what they want to see, staff will create a few mission statements for the next meeting. Hansen asked if anyone else has comments. Harzallah indicated he likes the line in the current statement that mentions the quality of life. Perez Umphress stated she isn't sure if this is recognized elsewhere but is wondering about having some kind of land acknowledgement for the native land we are occupying. Ostergaard asked how the city deals with land acknowledgement. Marquez Simula replied there currently isn't one, but she is trying to work with people on one. There is a citywide statement waiting on the next step. Harzallah asked if there is a good representation of the Native community in the city. Marquez Simula replied there is an American Indian group with the school district that is active. They put on the pow wow every year. Ostergaard replied that a note could be made that if and when the city adopts something, that the Park & Recreation Commission will also adopt that land acknowledgement. Hansen indicated he will present the next few chapters of the Park Improvement Plan to the Commission in the next few meetings.

Macko reminded the Commission that the next meeting will be located at Huset Park West.

Hansen stated the group will walk around Sullivan Lake Park and he will give some history on the park. In 2006 the city council started talking about park improvements at all the parks. They started looking at new playgrounds in 2007. At that time collectively everything needed so much work that staff decided to begin working with the Park and Recreation Commission to review all of the city parks. It was determined to begin park improvements with Sullivan Lake Park. No park improvements had been made since the late 1970's. A consultant was hired to prepare a master plan for Sullivan Lake Park. The community was included during the planning process. Hansen indicated that is one of the fun things during the process and the Commission will enjoy working with the residents when it comes to that process. Yes, you hear about problems but there are many ideas of what the residents like or want to see in the park. One of the primary components at Sullivan Lake that residents wanted to keep was the lake and the walking path around it. Prior to this there was an old wood structure that was deteriorating and was an L-shape. One of the questions the Commission and consultant looked at was what size of a shelter people wanted to have. Because the park shelter would be rented and used for parties they wanted to keep a large shelter. The playset was kept at a smaller scale knowing that it might be expanded in the future. Nothing was done with the tennis courts because in 2008 the courts were playable. They are not playable today. Most of our parks have a deficiency in parking. The neighbors indicated they do not want to have car lights shining into their homes, so the parking lot was designed at a lower level with shrubs around the hill to help as well. The trail around the rest of the park was redone as well. Hansen reported a couple of things that will change at the park. One being the small building with two restroom and an old lift station needs updating. That is programmed for replacement in 2025. The lift station for sanitary sewage will be brought towards the front of the area and get it out of the middle of the park. The old Medtronic property comprehensive plan amendment is complete for that site so Medtronic will be putting it back on the market for a developer to come in and redevelop it. There are two primary parts of that redevelopment that the city must consider. One is stormwater management. Residents have stated they want the storm water improved. Medtronic or whomever is going to redevelop the site is going to have to complete significant stormwater improvements. There are also opportunities for outside sources to improve the flow of stormwater that comes into the lake. There is a watershed that would help with water quality improvement. Sullivan Lake is a shallow lake and is treated differently by the State of Minnesota and our management plan. The maximum depth is nine feet and average depth is just under six. The lake is also highly eutrophic, and the main process of decay is due to the large amount of leaves that are deposited in the lake. There are seven storm water inlets and if it wasn't for those inlets it would probably be swampland. Hansen reported with the potential housing development in the area staff want to look at the size of the playground structure and being able to serve the amount of families in this area. The new development will need to have their own interior play structure or have some kind of

agreement that the new developer either gives the city land or funds to accomplish a larger structure. The last item is the fitness court. This is required to be located a certain distance from a playground structure. This will be installed in 2025, and city staff will be doing a large portion of the work. Ostergaard brought this up recently with residents and the first response was why is this happening when there are other things desired in the city. She asked when the city will be releasing information on the project and are there any talking points the Commission can use when speaking to residents. Hansen replied the announcement was made in the city newsletter that a fitness court is coming to Sullivan Lake Park and communication will continue to be made on the project. As part of the agreement with getting the grant the organization wants to host a grand opening event with the community. Staff will advertise that the fitness court is coming. Ostergaard added and why we are putting the fitness court in. Hansen indicated this may not be the only one that we receive. Sullivan Park received the second highest score from the grant review committee, Huset Park received the highest score.

New Business

None at this time.

Reports

A. Recreation Director

Windschitl reported he met with the new city manager and discussed the status of the recreation program, daily operations, and how it all relates with John P Murzyn Hall. They discussed the future of the building and how the city council will need to determine what they want to do with the facility. Windschitl presented his concerns with the building structure itself.

The summer Adult Softball Men's and Co-Ed league ended, and the Men's Fall Softball began last week. The summer youth programs ended two weeks ago. The staff were really great, and participation numbers were higher this year as well. Soccer is the next program to get started and we are in need of coaches. This is entry level soccer for 1st – 6th grades. They play games with Immaculate Conception School and are looking to connect with other local schools. Eisenbise asked if Prodeo Academy has a team. Windschitl replied they are checking with their board to see if that is allowed. Staff are also connecting with St. Charles to get more teams. Ostergaard asked how many teams there are typically. Windschitl replied two or three at some of the grade levels. We have the participation numbers this year but are in need of coaches to get started. Ostergaard asked if there is a flyer or something that she can present at the Valley View open house. Windschitl replied yes.

B. Public Works Director

Hansen reported there was a really good group of seasonal staff this year. There were ten staff and are down to one person at the end of next week due to people going back to school. The goal is to keep one seasonal staff through the fall because there is always enough work with trimming and other seasonal work. A Safe Roads to School grant was received and are installing new sidewalks around the schools. The most recent one was on Monroe, south of 49th to 47th. The concrete alley program will be wrapping up in the next few weeks. More alleys will be addressed next year. They are very expensive to reconstruct. The city council authorized a two-year plan. Next year there will be ten or eleven alleys completed. MNDOT will be presented more information regarding the Central Avenue reimagined and reconstructed project. There was a grassroots group that is trying to establish a downtown area off 40th Street. Central Avenue will be completely reconstructed by 2028. MNDOT is coming forward with a lot of funding for that. One of the nicest parts will be a ten-foot trail or path on both sides of the road out of concrete. The road will be narrowed from a four lane to a two lane. MNDOT will be attending the next work session with the city council. This is really a MNDOT lead project with city participation. Staff are also working with the county to get 40th Avenue reconstructed. The road will be narrowed with pedestrian facilities added. Staff will be meeting with the county tomorrow to lay out a plan for grant funding.

Hansen indicated there is a lot of federal grant funding options for transportation.

C. Commission Members

Perez Umphress mentioned from the last meeting the discussion of a park's passport. She drew up a quick example on Canva. There were two examples of what it could look like for each park. This would be a way to collect feedback from each park by including a QR code. She shared the examples with the Commission. Hansen reported a community survey was completed in 2022 but information like this can certainly be used in the park planning process. Marquez Simula replied this is a great project to include our communications department on so they can sync it up with the city website and social media. It is a great way to connect with residents.

The commission walked around Sullivan Lake Park as Hansen continued to discuss the history and conditions of the park. The condition of the tennis courts was discussed. One of the questions to be asked during the park planning process is keeping a balance among all the parks between active and passive spaces. Other items discussed included parking, tree preservation and planting, lake conditions, restrooms, and other artwork or flower garden within the park. Hansen reported there are not a lot of other plans right now besides the building with the lift station, the removal of the tennis courts, and where to put the fitness court. Staff have applied for trial funding through the DNR. There is an area along the trail that needs to be changed on how it is being held up from the lake. The group continued to walk the path around the lake.

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

Macko adjourned the meeting at 7:32 pm.

Deanna Saefke, Recreation Secretary