



**Park & Recreation Commission Minutes of the Meeting**  
**John P Murzyn Hall - Senior Center, 530 Mill St**  
**June 28, 2023**

---

**Call to Order/Roll Call**

Tom Greenhalgh called the meeting to order at 5:30 pm

Members present: Teresa Eisenbise, Tom Greenhalgh, Dayna Gulley, Taher Harzallah, Andrew Macko, Andrea Ostergaard

Staff present: David Cullen, Streets & Parks Superintendent; Keith Windschitl Recreation Director; Deanna Saefke, Recreation Secretary; Amada Marquez Simula, Council Representative; Lenny Austin, Chief of Police

**Community Forum**

Windschitl explained this is the request from the previous meeting to add a Community Forum to the agenda. This item will be at the front of the meeting so that anyone attending from the public can talk or present right away and not have to sit through the whole meeting. There will be a five-minute limit for the person to present their item of discussion.

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

**Consent Agenda**

Eisenbise asked what the advertising other budget line item is for. Windschitl replied in the past Murzyn Hall was advertised with bridal companies like Twin Cities Bridal, but we haven't done any paid advertising in a few years. Even without current advertising the hall has been fairly booked up. He anticipates with the increased rental fees that some advertising may need to be done in the next year or two.

Eisenbise asked in the repair and maintenance serviced for the parks budget what is that used for. Cullen indicated some repairs and maintenance items are looked at over a two-year time period to spread out costs over time. Staff also look at sharing costs adjustments and predict from year to year what the budget might need to be.

Eisenbise asked about the general staffing budgets because they tend to be lower than in years past. She asked if it was because the department is understaffed. Cullen replied within Public Works, the Utilities department is currently down two fulltime positions, and the Parks department is down one fulltime position. Eisenbise was wondering if this presented an opportunity for raises if there is more money in the budget than current staff.

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

**Letters and Requests**

**Old Business**

None at this time.

### **New Business**

Chief Austin reported over Memorial Day weekend a call was received for shots fired at Silver Lake Beach Park. Officers arrived, searched the area, suspects had already left but thirty-four shell casings of two different calibers were found in the area. Based on some of the trajectories it appeared shots were being fired at each other and not just up in the air. Austin stated that historically Silver Lake Park has been a quiet area, so this incident is being taken seriously. One of the measures being taken is the city has rented a portable camera trailer to monitor the area. This will allow staff to consider options for safety measures at this location. Austin indicated several years ago a similar situation occurred at Huset Park and cameras were installed. Staff are thinking this might be a good option for Silver Lake Beach Park. IT Director Hauf gave a brief estimate on the installation and setup of a camera at Silver Lake Beach. This cost estimate was handed out to the Commission. Austin reported the cost is lower than he expected. Over the past few years, the price of cameras has gone down, and the quality of the cameras has gone up. Hauf gave two installation options, one to have City Staff do the work or one to have Marco staff come and do the installation. Austin reported the reason for bringing this to the Commission is because there was a follow-up incident at Silver Lake Beach Park the following weekend. A report was received with several vehicles heading towards the park around 11:15 pm, after the park closed. It just so happened one of the officers were at the park during that time. The vehicles driving on Stinson Blvd saw the officer, stopped, and turned around. Officers were able to stop one of the vehicles and recovered five firearms out of the vehicle. Most cities in the metro area are dealing with similar issues.

Austin recommends doing some kind of camera installation at Silver Lake Beach Park. Another item to consider is signage. Informing the public that there are cameras at the park. If signage is installed the City does have a responsibility to make sure the camera is operating at all times. Austin indicated Huset Park already has cameras installed throughout both sides of the park. He stated with the cost of these cameras continuing to decrease in price, it may be something to consider long term in the park redevelopment process to install cameras at every park, over a period of time. In this particular incident we were fortunate that an officer was at the park during that second call. Cameras at the park might not have stopped this group, but word does spread, so from a deterrent standpoint camera can help.

Austin spoke with Windschitl about adjusting the park operating hours as an option. The current policy has parks closing at 11pm which was put into effect due to adult sports programs. Austin stated that since this park neighbors The Three Rivers Silverwood Park, it may be an idea to adjust to similar hours at this one park. Gulley asked if the cameras are recording or doing a live monitoring back to the police department. Austin replied the cameras are on a city server, but it will not be constantly monitored. For example, the cameras around Huset Park are recorded 24/7 and staff have the ability to look at a timeline with activity markers when there is motion. Gulley asked if it is mainly reviewed after an incident. Austin replied yes. The cameras just helped to identify a suspect who vandalized the park building at Bruce Nawrocki Park. The cameras don't necessarily prevent crime, but there is a deterring component for some people. Austin reported a camera trailer is being purchased for large events, like during the Jamboree weekend, and that camera can be monitored through a phone or other devices. He indicated when he visited Silver Lake Park a few days after Memorial Day he was surprised at how many people were using the park. This is a beautiful park that you can tell gets used a lot. The usage of the parks has increased over the past few years. That is why the Commission may want to consider phasing in cameras at the parks over time.

Greenhalgh asked if Public Works staff can do some of the work on the camera installation. Cullen replied yes, some work can be done internally like trimming trees that might obstruct the view of the camera, or general support to the company doing the install. As far as running the data cables, that is all done by a company such as

Marko. He indicated it is much easier to install cameras during the renovation process of the parks as opposed to going back into an existing structure. Greenhalgh agreed. Ostergaard asked with the increase of received police calls was that related just to parks. Austin replied no, call volume overall in the City is up about 15% from last year to date. Ostergaard asked how often they are being dispatched to the parks. Austin replied Huset and Sullivan are the two busiest parks for calls, but overall they do not get dispatched to the parks very often. In a 24-hour period they average between 60-70 calls and with that call volume it pulls staff away from the additional routine patrols of the park system. With the increase in park use it is a reasonable thing to consider installing cameras. Ostergaard asked if staff noticed a change in behaviors after the cameras were installed at Huset Park. Austin replied he doesn't think there have been calls to the shelter since the cameras were installed. Ostergaard asked if the cameras were initially installed because it is a busy park. Austin replied that was part of it but there was also an increase in several large group events at that time. The park was being left in a mess, there were fireworks complaints, and it was nice to have the cameras with the Jamboree event. Cullen reported that last year a fire hydrant was run over at 39<sup>th</sup> and Central Avenue. A description of the semitruck was received but nothing more than that. Staff were able to watch the cameras at Huset Park, determine more details of the truck and turn the information into insurance.

Windschitl reiterated the parks are very busy and that almost ever park is rented once per weekend right now. The amount of trash left behind is unbelievable. Each park is being rented one time per the three days of a weekend. The issue is now that if the park is rented on a Sunday there could be people using the park on Friday and/or Saturday so the renter might show up on Sunday and the park isn't clean. The people actually doing the rentals are typically responsible and leave the park in good condition. Windschitl stated the current park hours are until 11pm because of adult softball leagues that might end around 10:30 pm with teams out of the park at 10:45 pm. When speaking with Austin, the type of activity at Silver Lake Beach Park probably would not be discouraged by having a sign indicating the park closes at 10pm. He added that could be done even if it was a temporary sign. Windschitl spoke to a few council members, and they also think that having the Silver Lake Beach Park hours coincided with Silverwood Park is a good idea. Eisenbise reported at the top of the hill by the park there are two signs indicating the park closes at 10pm and one at 11pm. Ostergaard asked if Silverwood Park has security cameras. Austin replied he assumes so but does not know for sure. Macko replied that the ones he is aware of around Silverwood Park would not capture the activity at Silver Lake Beach. Gulley asked if a camera captures people littering and so forth, if the police are able to identify them will they be prosecuted or fined. Austin replied if it is a situation where they did rent the pavilion the police would work with the Recreation Department to potentially enforce a fee. His main concern is with intentional damage to City property or criminal behavior. For example, the recent property damage at the Bruce Nawrocki Park building was upwards of \$10,000 and if the insurance company can recoup some of the costs related to that, it is worth investigating as we only have two investigators on staff. Gulley asked if it would be a deterrent to have a sign posted indicating fines for littering, even if there isn't the intent of prosecuting every offense. Austin replied if signs are going to be posted than those signs need to be followed through on. He indicated there are better ways to help combat littering. These are also issues that result in such high usage of the parks. Ostergaard indicated littering is unfortunate, but the more concerning issue is the guns in the parks. She wonders if cameras are going to be an answer to the gun violence. This might be an opportunity to partner with Silverwood Park and use their camera system in some way. Austin replied cameras might not prevent this particular incident but certainly would have helped to solve this crime. Eisenbise asked if this is similar to the cases happening in Brooklyn Park. Austin replied that has been discussed and metro agencies are working together to handle or prevent these incidents. He stated the occupants of the vehicle that was stopped were not from Columbia Heights. Gulley asked if they were minors in the vehicle. Austin replied there was one juvenile and the rest were adults. Harzallah asked if there were concerns from residents near the park regarding the angles of the cameras and any views into their homes. Austin replied that is a great question and camera angles have not been looked

at yet. The angles will be looked at because they want to get the best view of the park with the equipment. He knows the current camera trailer does not have any views into homes. Greenhalgh asked what the monthly fee covers. Austin replied that is for the cell service because it is wireless. There is a cradle point system in every squad car. The cost of the cameras would come out of the parks budget. Windschitl pointed out that the proposal from the IT Director has an option for installation by city staff. Ostergaard if there is an uptick in crime at other parks or what is the reason to phase in additional cameras at those parks. Austin replied that is correct, the activity in the parks has increased over the past three to four years. Calls have increased but nothing significant in recent years. Ostergaard asked is this something that is part of a long-term plan and phased in more thoughtfully or is putting them into all of the parks just reactionary to this one park. Austin replied that because of the circumstances of this incident and the fact that this park is off the beaten path there were concerns. Then six to seven days later the group returned. As far as phasing in cameras it is due to the usage issues, also from a security standpoint, protecting the infrastructure we have, and that the costs have dropped with the systems it is something to consider adding with the future redevelopment of the city parks. Austin indicated it is similar to adding anti-graffiti coating to buildings. We do this currently and this would be an example of protection. He explained when the public safety building was built, they did not install cameras on the outside of the building. Approximately five to six years ago they were added but it wasn't thought about at the time of construction. Cullen added technology has gotten so much better, some of the current camera systems used in the city are wireless and five years ago this was unheard of. The quality of the picture is so much better now.

A resident in attendance lives near Silver Lake Beach Park and he and his daughter pick up trash from the beach very often, especially alcohol bottles. Although he doesn't appreciate the groups who litter, he is more concerned with the people who are there late at night making poor decisions after drinking so much alcohol. He feels the deterrent part is needed at that park. It is great to see the beach so busy. The concern is the poor behaviors after 10pm at night.

**Motion** by Macko, second by Gulley, to recommend to the City Council to move forward with the installation of cameras at Silver Lake Beach Park. Upon vote: All ayes. **Motion Carried.**

**Motion** by Ostergaard, second by Eisenbise, to recommend to the City Council to amend the ordinance regarding park hours and change the park hours to end at 10 pm for Silver Lake Beach Park. Upon vote: All ayes. **Motion Carried.**

Austin replied that the timeline with City Council meetings and process to change an ordinance will take a number of weeks, so this probably would not go into effect until next year. Greenhalgh asked if the sign at the beach indicating the 11pm closing time could be removed. Austin indicated that the camera trailer is rented for another two months so that would go into August.

## Reports

### A. Recreation Director

Windschitl reported the recreation summer park programs started last week and the participation numbers are really good. Today was a Wild Wednesday trip to Wild Mountain. So far this year there hasn't been any rainouts for adult softball. The 12U girls fastpitch softball has qualified for the nationals tournament. He indicated in the bills for the next meeting there will be an HVAC repair. The unit for the bar area of the hall had a leak in the freon. The unit was repaired and 25 pounds of freon was added to the unit which costs \$100 per pound. With labor and parts, the repair will be approximately \$3300.

**B. Public Works Director**

Cullen reported Jim Hauth, the acting Public Works Director is leaving the third week in July. He took the Director of Public Works position in another city. This is the city where he grew up. Staff are sad to see him leave but wish him well. He reported there are eight seasonal staff this year. They are good quality staff and he attributes that to the wage increase.

**C. Commission Members**

Marquez-Simula mentioned keeping the discussion of bike racks for old business at a future meeting. She reported interviews for the new Sustainability Committee were held on Monday and Tuesday, and almost every person interviewed mentioned bike racks, biking, and anything to do with biking. She thanked staff for looking into the number of bike racks throughout the city.

Ostergaard reported seeing a lot of dog waste in parks lately. She has not seen dog waste stations along the walking path at Sullivan Lake Park. Cullen replied they are at every park. At Sullivan Park there is one at the beginning of the walking path by the parking lot. He stresses to staff to make sure that the stations are filled with biodegradable bags. Austin replied police staff give them away at every event they attend. Windschitl reported discussions during previous commission meetings were to be careful not to over sign in the parks. That is why staff try to use existing poles when adding any signage. Ostergaard asked if it would help to move the dog waste stations occasionally or add more. Cullen replied they are typically installed at park entrances. There is a cost to the dog stations. Harzallah indicated their HOA supplies dog waste bags and people often use them as they are coming into Huset Park. Marquez-Simula reported that the City Council recently passed a water quality ordinance that it is illegal to leave animal waste. She doesn't know how much signage there is listing the ordinance number. It does help to have some signs so the public feels more comfortable pointing to a sign when they are saying something to a user of the park. Harzallah asked if there could be some kind of public service announcement in the city newsletter regarding the water quality ordinance, and dog policies.

Greenhalgh adjourned the meeting at 6:27 pm.

Deanna Saefke, Recreation Secretary