



**Park & Recreation Commission Minutes of the Meeting**  
**Keyes Park – 1345 45 ½ Street**  
**July 27, 2022**

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**Call to Order/Roll Call**

Tom Greenhalgh called the meeting to order at 5:31 pm

Members present: Sean Clerkin, Brian Clerkin, Tom Greenhalgh, Dayna Gulley, Andy Macko, Nicole Peterson

Staff present: Kelli Bourgeois, City Manager; Kevin Hansen, Public Works Director/City Engineer; Deanna Saefke, Commission Secretary; Keith Windschitl, Recreation Director; Connie Buesgens, Council Representative

Also present: Resident Dan Spriggs

**Consent Agenda**

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

**Letters and Requests**

None at this time.

**Motion** by S Clerkin, second by B Clerkin, to grant the Sullivan family the resident rental rate for Sullivan Park. Upon vote: All ayes. **Motion Carried.**

**Old Business**

4. Staff will discuss the results of the Facility Assessment Report on the John P Murzyn Hall facility conducted by Wold Architects and Engineers.

Hansen reported park improvements has been a topic of discussion for quite a while. After the new city hall, the next facility to review is Murzyn Hall. A condition analysis was conducted. The plan was to evaluate the condition of the building and determine the costs of bringing it up to a certain level by fixing what is wrong with it or the cost of a total replacement. They looked at exterior issue and the interior condition of the building. The condition index is not at the same level as the existing city hall to go directly to a replacement building. The building itself is salvageable but it is going to take quite an investment in the facility. The question is at what level do we want to make that investment or is it feasible and reasonable to go to the community for a fifteen million plus ask for funding a new building in addition to other needs. The original building is from the 1930s; it has drainage issues, the wood floor needs full replacement, interior accessibility was looked at, changing the kitchen from a full kitchen to more of a catering kitchen, water penetration, were some of the things identified and then the costs associated with those. Even to obtain another 15 years out of the building would cost around four million just to bring things up to where they should be. For example, getting the HVAC out of the attic, a new roof, building a space for the HVAC units, and other items. Hansen stated the building has deteriorated but yet it still represents an icon or a long-term identity with Columbia Heights. S Clerkin replied a remodel is much more feasible and financially responsible than a new facility. B Clerkin commented on the history of multiple generations of people using Murzyn Hall and it is one of the only buildings that people can say that about. Hansen indicated that with all buildings it will reach a point where it needs to be replaced. Gulley asked if the

options are a rebuild or a remodel, and what is the dollar figure for a remodel or rebuild. Hansen replied about four million for a remodel. Gulley replied fifteen million for a rebuild. Hansen replied if the City or City Council wants to go to a rebuild the fifteen million was a comparative number to what the facility is now. It would then need to be explored as to what the community wants Murzyn Hall to be. Would there be the same features or does the public want something additional or different. Bourgeois indicated there is a public component even with a remodel. With the usage of the building there are things that could be done to make it more efficient, to make it better fit the community needs now that weren't present back when it was built. She stated the options are to choose the base level where you get the facility to continue to operate and not deteriorate, do you make other additions or changes that are not in the four million dollars estimate but at the fifteen million level, or do you take the building down and build new. There are layers that need to be considered but what is feasible financially and where is the opinion of the community. Gulley asked what the time frame would be for a remodel versus a rebuild, would it be about the same. Hansen replied possibly but it is unknown. There are certain things that require the building to be shut down for an amount of time like the new roof. A new building like this could take 12-15 months where a remodel might be closer to nine months. Gulley asked if staff could relocate to the new city hall during construction. Bourgeois replied staff would probably use the old city hall as it will not be demolished right away. Greenhalgh asked if the City Council has thought about what direction they would like to take. Buesgens replied the council will be discussing the financial part of it on Monday.

Greenhalgh asked how the staff feel regarding the facility. Windschitl replied there are mixed feelings because of the historic value to the community and people do have a vested interest in the building but with that said there are a lot of problems. The report reflects a lot of the problems but does not go into dept. There are also a lot of unknown issues such as the mold from all of the water infiltration. Buesgens would suggest a tour of other community centers in the area to get a feel of what other places are doing before a decision is made on remodeling or building new. She would like to invite the Park & Recreation Commission if that is possible. Greenhalgh stated the open wood floor area is unique compared to other facilities. Buesgens indicated in her opinion that the wood floor and the fireplace are sentimental. Gulley replied maybe the fireplace could be preserved somehow or replicated. Hansen asked the Commission to consider that this is an expensive process, and we will be going to the community for financial support. The community survey indicated support for these types of projects, but at what level is unknown. Is there stronger support for renovating all of the parks or stronger support for Murzyn Hall or a community center. There may be support for both, but can we afford it all. Clerkin asked where the process of bonding is. Hansen replied staff will be having a conversation with the Council on August 1. More background is needed to obtain realistic numbers to present. Gulley asked if a remodel of the facility allowed for more functions or activities at Murzyn Hall is the additional revenue being calculated to offset some of the remodel costs. Hansen replied the facility assessment for a remodel does not expand the available use of the hall. Unless rental rates are increased there is no additional funds to pay back any debt. Gulley indicated a remodel or a rebuild is a win either way, but something needs to be done. Hansen replied the facility definitely needs work. Do you want to get 15 to 20 years out of a remodel or make a large investment right now. With current prices he doesn't think that fifteen million is enough for a new facility.

5. Staff will discuss requirements needed for a skate park.

Hansen provided background on previous discussions of a skate park. The number one issue is where would a skate park be best placed and what land is available. Just because there is green space within the city doesn't mean that the land is available there. In past discussions with the Commission there were two primary locations discussed. The corner of 49<sup>th</sup> Street and Johnson Street adjacent to Ramsdell Park is a primary location but is owned by the ISD 13. This area is highly visible, it would be right next to the schools and the park to allow many users. The second area discussed by the Commission was Huset Park. The Huset Park master plan currently does

not identify a skate park. Hansen indicated there really isn't a lot of other green space where you could have a skate park with accessible parking. Another discussion with a previous Park & Recreation Commission in terms of building the Capital Improvement Program for parks was if there were thirty items on a list this would be number 31. At that time, it was the lowest priority from everything else that the parks system needed. S Clerkin asked if a full-size soccer field is going to be placed at Huset Park in a redesign. Hansen replied yes. Hansen concluded this is just some of the background from previous discussions. Someone mentioned wood ramps at a skate park and staff would highly recommend not having wood ramps due to the maintenance and storing them during winter. Greenhalgh asked what the insurance costs and how much liability is on the city with having a skate park. Hansen stated this is where the past commission was at. If the decision is made to pursue a skate park staff would want to see something that is more easily maintained like a concrete structure and then really identifying the location. Bourgeois indicated her concern is not with the insurance side, but more concerned with the maintenance, overall costs, and replacement costs if there is damage. She stated if someone is injured on playground equipment for example, the liability is minimized under state statutes. Skate parks are a little different.

Gulley asked if the warming houses have ever been discussed to be open during the wintertime. Hansen replied no. Gulley would like to add that to the list and see them open during the winter. Hansen stated the use of the warming houses has been discussed in the past and the buildings came out of usage because people weren't skating. Now it is not only the lack of use but also the condition of the buildings and staffing. Gulley stated she understands all of the issues, but it would be nice to have one skate park where a building is open. If you look at other surrounding communities, they are having beautiful ice-skating parks that are highly used. S Clerkin replied those other cities have bigger budgets. Last year Huset East had ice at it again and was used for a special event. Windschitl received a lot of compliments on the Snow Blast event held at Huset East.

Hansen commented in the last CIP update from the commission in 2021 a skate park is not included. There is no representation for the cost of a skate park.

### **New Business**

6. Windschitl will review rental fees, damage deposit, and policies for John P Murzyn Hall.

Windschitl indicated the rental rates for Murzyn Hall are reviewed each coming year. He recently met with the City Manager, Police Chief, and Assistant Fire Chief to discuss ways to tighten up the procedures during Murzyn Hall rentals and reduce our liability. Smaller groups will help to reduce the abuse on the building. As soon as the City Council approves the recommendations set by the Commission today the policies will go into effect immediately on any new rental. He reported with the extra use, large groups, extra clean up needed, the costs have risen for repairs, especially with HVAC. The building is old, and the HVAC units are out of date and require monthly repairs to keep the facility running. Costs for utilities keep rising. Staff feels it is time to look at increasing the rental rates to help offset these costs. Windschitl referenced the attached memo stating the City did a staff wage comparison study and the custodial position hourly wage increased about 41%. This has really impacted the rentals. Staffing for an event can cost \$300-\$500, a \$1000 rental fee doesn't even cover the utilities and other operating costs. S Clerkin asked what the wages were prior to the study. Windschitl replied custodians started around \$17 per hour. S Clerkin asked what the staff recommendation was for a wage. Windschitl replied that he was not in charge of the study, but he was originally thinking around \$21 per hour. This new wage will produce more qualified and responsible applicants. S Clerkin asked what the approximate operating cost is for a Saturday rental. Windschitl responded if it includes all of the cleanup from a rental the day prior or not, but staff time can generally be around \$660 for just staff costs. That does not include any utilities or snow removal or other fees. Bourgeois clarified that is only custodial staff time and does not include

any administrative time, giving tours, or setting up the event. Windschitl replied that is correct and it doesn't cover any repair costs or anything else. He stated this is one of the reasons for discussing the rates now instead of waiting until the end of the year. The rental rates were already set for 2022 and 2023 but staff feels this is something that should go into effect immediately.

Windschitl revisited some of the items in the memo to address situations that occur during rentals that may increase the liability on the City. The first situation is the alcohol service. Currently there are times where a renter may bring in an outside source to serve alcohol and it takes time to acquire the license and insurance for that. We are unfamiliar with those bartenders, and it is a lot more to put together. Staff are suggesting for all events with more than fifty guests to be required to use the Columbia Heights Lions Club for bartending. They do a great service and have reasonable costs, the club has their own insurance coverage, and we know they are familiar with the rules.

Windschitl indicated the second item it to increase the damage deposit from \$500 to \$700. Right now, things have run pretty well with the \$500 but there have been a few larger breaks that cost more and we would like to have a little more on the reserve to work with.

The third item Windschitl discussed is that the renters would lose all of their damage deposit if the attendance were fifty or more people over the disclosed amount. This has been an issue lately because groups have indicated they were expecting 200 guests, that is also the current number of guests where people are not required to use the Lions Club for bartending if they have less than 200 people, then over the course of the day they pull more chairs into the hall above they 200 that are setup. Some of these groups have even gone into our storage closet and pulled out additional tables and chairs while our custodial staff is in another part of the building. They know before the party even starts that they are expecting more than 200 people. Staff feel that if extra staff, extra cleanup, and additional repairs are needed then the renter will forfeit their entire damage deposit.

Windschitl indicated the last item is regarding the rental rates for John P. Murzyn Hall. Staff would like to see one rental rate for Friday, Saturday, and Sunday, and then a lower rate for Monday through Thursday rentals. Enclosed in the packet are rental fees for other venues such as Silverwood Park and the Vadnais Heights Commons facility. These venues are a little comparable, maybe a little nicer facilities, but they do have other add on fees that we do not have. They also have selected caterers the renters are required to use, and the facility gets a percentage back. Murzyn Hall will still allow renters to bring in any food that has been prepared off site. Staff are proposing to double the current rates effective immediately. S Clerkin suggests increasing the damage deposit to \$800 but he doesn't agree with doubling the current rental fee. He feels there should be an increase but doesn't want to price us out of the market. Windschitl replied that allowing renters to bring their own food in is extremely rare. That is a huge benefit for cost savings and for various ethnicities to have food from their own culture. If someone wants to cook onsite, they will need a catering license and insurance, but that is rarely ever done properly. Most people and catering companies do not want to cook in our kitchen, but just keep their food warm or cold. S Clerkin suggests an increase of half of the fee until a remodel is done on the facility. He indicated that a huge restriction of the alcohol policy will alleviate a lot of the issues during events. B Clerkin replied the Lions Club members are happy to take over the bar service for more events. S Clerkin favors a higher damage deposit because he doesn't want to see renters penalized financially prior to having an event. Bourgeois asked S Clerkin to clarify the amount of increase he is suggesting. S Clerkin replied instead of doubling the amount to take one and a half time the amount.

**Motion** by Gulley, second by Greenhalgh, to require rentals groups of fifty or more people to contract the bar service with the Columbia Heights Lions Club, effective immediately on all new rentals once the City Council approves the motion. Upon vote: All ayes. **Motion Carried.**

**Motion** by B Clerkin, second by S Clerkin, to increase the Damage Deposit to \$800, effective immediately on all new rentals once the City Council approves the motion. Upon vote: All ayes. **Motion Carried.**

**Motion** by S Clerkin, second by Gulley, for groups that have more than fifty people in attendance over the disclosed amount given for the setup will lose all of their damage deposit, effective immediately on all new rentals once the City Council approves the motion. Upon vote: All ayes. **Motion Carried.**

**Motion** by S Clerkin, second by B Clerkin, to increase the rental rates for Murzyn Hall by 1.5 times the current 2023 rate; before tax the Monday through Thursday rate will be \$1,731.48 and Friday through Sunday rate \$2,824.61, effective immediately on all new rentals once the City Council approves the motion. Upon vote: 5 ayes, 1 opposed. **Motion Carried.**

Windschitl indicated the nonprofit rates should also be increased slightly in order to cover operating costs. Currently nonprofit groups are charged a facility entry fee of \$60 and if they are a group within Columbia Heights the hourly rate is \$25, and a non-resident group is \$50 per hour. As previously indicated, Windschitl stated the new custodial wage is almost \$30 per hour with fringe benefits. Greenhalgh agrees that the hourly rate should be raised. B Clerkin indicated the entry fee could be raised slightly to \$70 help cover costs as well.

**Motion** by B Clerkin, second by S Clerkin, to increase the nonprofit rental rates of Murzyn Hall. The facility entry fee will be \$70, the hourly rates for resident groups \$30, and nonresident groups \$60 per hour; effective immediately on all new rentals once the City Council approves the motion. Upon vote: All ayes. **Motion Carried.**

S Clerkin indicated the rental rates should be revisited once a remodel of the hall is completed. Windschitl replied when the Commission considers the remodel or rebuild of the facility people need to consider the use of the building and do whether or not we want to continue as is. In regard to the banquet hall and the whole kitchen, is it necessary to have all of that equipment when renters are bringing in their own food. Is an oven and hood needed because if that is brought up to code it is going to require a lot more than what is currently there. S Clerkin agrees that a warming kitchen would be sufficient enough. Gulley asked if Silverwood Park has a kitchen. Windschitl replied it is only a serving kitchen with no ovens. Something like that is all that is needed here. Often times the groups that are trying to cook in our kitchen are not licensed or insured, so why should the city be liable for that risk. S Clerkin asked if the full kitchen appliances are removed if insurance costs for the city are lowered. Windschitl replied that would need to be looked at.

## **Reports**

### **A. Recreation Director**

Windschitl reported summer programs are ending in the next couple of weeks. Other programs are still occurring, but the youth park and theater programs are ending. Adult softball has had a few rainouts and playoffs are in the next two to three weeks. The youth girls fastpitch softball has been very successful this year, four teams are going to state tournaments and the 12U team is going to the Nationals tournament. Three teams are already signed up for Fall leagues with the Big West League. There have been great volunteer coaches and it has been a great program for the community. Saefke pointed out that the Squirts Baseball program for 2<sup>nd</sup> and 3<sup>rd</sup> grade boys and girls is happening at the field near the meeting.

**B. Public Works Director/City Engineer**

Hansen reported one reason for holding the meeting at Keyes Park was for the Commission to see a master plan for a park and what the results were from construction. Staff try to maximize the funding available for each project but sometimes there are things that cannot be completed. One example at Keyes Park is the walking path at the top of the hill; there just wasn't enough money for that piece. It has been discussed in the next Parks CIP to remodel or replace the building at the park. One idea discussed is to keep the existing building and add on a covered shelter with picnic tables. Gulley asked if the path is still planned to be constructed at the top of the hill. Hansen replied yes, it is in the Master Plan and the overall Parks CIP.

**C. Commission Members**

None at this time.

Greenhalgh adjourned the meeting at 6:22 pm.  
Deanna Saefke, Recreation Secretary