



Park & Recreation Commission Meeting
City Hall, 3989 Central Ave NE
July 23, 2025

MINUTES

Call to Order/Roll Call

Andrew Macko called the meeting to order at 6:01 pm

Members present: Michael Deneen, Teresa Eisenbise, Taher Herzallah, Andrew Macko, Andrea Ostergard

Staff present: Kevin Hansen, Public Works Director; David Cullen, Public Works Street/Parks Superintendent; Keith Windschitl, Recreation Director; Deanna Saefke, Recreation; Secretary; Connie Buesgens, Council Liaison

MISSION STATEMENT

The mission of the Columbia Heights Parks & Recreation Commission is to foster a healthy, inclusive community by providing a diverse park system and recreational opportunities that enhance the quality of life for people of all ages while fostering sustainability and environmental stewardship for future generations.

Community Forum

Residents Teresa and Bob Carson addressed the Commission. They live at the Parkside Village Townhomes and share a property line with the park. Carson asked if the pickleball courts are off of the Sullivan Park improvement plans for good. She asked if there is an answer to that. Macko replied the Commission has discussed pickleball courts in the past. Hansen asked if Macko would like him to respond. Macko replied yes. Hansen stated that item will go through the plan update that will be hosted with the public in probably September. Based on feedback there is an inclination to remove the pickleball courts from the concepts and look at other court uses. At the end of the day the Park & Recreation Commission will make a recommendation to the city council after they go through the public process. The city council will then make the final determination as to what the final plans are for Sullivan Park.

Teresa Carson asked if the half basketball court would go away as well. Hansen replied he doesn't know at this time. Carson stated in regard to the placement of the playground equipment, the adults are at the picnic shelter or the fitness court and the playground seems far away from where the parents are. In the plans it is also adjacent to their property line. This is not something that their townhome association members would be very pleased about. There will be an increase in noise and also who is watching the kids. Those are some of the concerns from the neighbors. Hasen replied these are all good comments and will be good to bring up when there is a public discussion to go over what is going to happen with the rest of the park once the fitness court is installed. Currently that date is the September Park & Recreation Commission meeting. There is a grand opening for the fitness court planned at that time. This is also a good opportunity to be at that site and host a public informational meeting to update the master plan based on comments received. That would be a good time for the neighbors to bring their items up again. Hansen reported the city was awarded the grant for the playground equipment. This will create a need to update the master plan. Staff understand that proximity of the park side to the townhomes is important for residents, so staff are looking at ways to make modifications in order to have separation incorporated into the plan. He indicated at a previous council meeting it was asked if this project is currently funded and no it is not. It is in the tentative budget for 2026 and now with the grant funding the project becomes realistic. The grant funding is only for the playground equipment.

Hansen reported the timing is that there is a lift station building that was slated for reconstruction in 2022 which was delayed in part not knowing what was going to happen with the Medtronic site. That lift station needs to be moved. The current plan is in the spring of 2026 to reconstruct the lift station and bring the facility forward towards 51st Avenue. Then the current building will be demolished. The new lift station will not have a building; it only has a panel and a backup generator. The playground construction would then follow that demolition in later summer. Bob Carson asked if the grant money came from the developer of the Medtronic location. Hansen replied no, it came from the Minnesota

DNR. The DNR has a program called the Outdoor Recreation Program. The max award for any application is \$350,000. The developer, once there is an approved development plan, through that development they will pay park dedication fees and those are based specifically on the development. Staff do not know what that will be yet. Hansen indicated there two areas where there is money coming in to park redevelopment, in this case it is grant money through the DNR and the second is when new residential development comes into the city through park dedication. The money in the park dedication fund is statutorily restricted as to what it can be used for. Carson asked if those funds need to be used at Sullivan Lake Park. Hansen replied no, it can be used anywhere within the city. The City Council is the one who authorizes what the uses are. Often times they like to use the money from that development near or in the park closest to the development. Carson thanked staff for their responses.

Resident Lori Averelle-Osborne addressed the commission. She indicated the proposed playground will be very close to her property line and if pickleball were installed it would be thirty to forty feet the other direction. There is a huge group of Ecuadorians that play volleyball so a sand volleyball court would be fantastic. Having the picnic shelter and pavilion in line with the sport court would be good for families. Moving the restrooms to lessen the noise would be appreciated. The group of volleyball players have now moved to someone's backyard a few houses down from the park; that is how much they play. They are a beautiful group of people and have cleaned up after they use the park. If the playground is installed where it is proposed it will be a far walk. She understands new playground is needed. Sand volleyball would be beneficial for the group of people who have already come to the park. She has never had a problem with that group, they stay late but cause no problems. Averelle-Osborne asked if there will be fencing along the property line to the park and the townhomes. Hansen replied these are excellent questions and appropriate input to have when the public discussion occurs in September to determine what will go in for 2026. This public discussion hadn't happened yet in part because of the unknown funding. He stated when the September meeting occurs the consultant will be included. There will be a notice sent out to the public in a fairly large area around the park to invite residents to the meeting. This will be the fourth Wednesday in September. Ostergaard asked if Averelle-Osborne is pro or against the pickleball courts. Averelle-Osborne replied she is against the pickleball court because they are so loud. The recommendation is 200 feet from homes. Hansen indicated that was one of the concerns brought forward at the city council meeting and the city of Maple Grove, Woodbury, and Eden Prairie are looking at ordinance restrictions or policies as to where a pickleball court is in relationship to single family homes.

Deneen added that he has seen volleyball players in the hockey rinks at Gauvitte and McKenna Parks so he feels there is a need for that space. Buesgens stated the Ecuadorians like to have a hard surface to play volleyball.

Consent Agenda

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

Letters and Requests

None at this time.

Old Business

Sullivan Lake Park update.

Hansen reported there are two separate items to update. One is the fitness court. The playground and tennis courts have been removed. The area has been graded where the fitness court will go. Concrete is scheduled to be poured today but with the weather conditions it was pushed off until Monday due to the heat. After that will be more grading of the area and installation of benches. During the week of August 4th it is tentatively scheduled that the National Fitness Campaign, NFC, contractors will install the equipment. He does not have a schedule for when the artwork will be installed. Staff are looking at having a grand opening in September and that would be a really good idea to have that with the Commission meeting. This will be an appropriate time to update the master plan for the rest of the park. He announced that the grant from Gametime Equipment was awarded for the playset equipment. With that there is an

opportunity to do some really nice things in the park. Timing of the whole project, there are public utilities that need to be redone during the first part of the construction season, and playground equipment installation later in the summer of 2026. Even in regard to picking out the equipment staff like to receive public input on the selections and colors. Staff are meeting tomorrow with a group from the playground vendor to go over their grant program. This grant is a 50/50 match. Ostergaard asked if there are any updates for the path around the lake. Hansen replied not around the lake but the rest of the walking path will be updated just before the installation of the playground and fitness court. He indicated that part of the recreation grant requirements is to have handicapped accessible restrooms and they will be the portable ones and not a permanent restroom. Ostergaard asked at the September meeting at what level will people truly be able to influence the park plan. Hansen replied to as much of a level that can be accommodated. There are certain requirements that need to be met, for example the fitness court requires that any playground equipment be at least 150 feet away from the court.

Ostergaard asked how the artist was chosen for the fitness court. Hansen replied NFC picked the artist and they then met with the city council. There was a general conversation about what type of art was desired. The art piece was then sent back to the city council for final approval. Herzallah asked if the placement of the art will be visible to shelter. Hansen replied no it will not, it was a discussion with NFC and the police department to have the art visible from the parking lot side to avoid vandalism. The art piece is in an east – west orientation and the fitness court is in a north – south orientation. Buesgens replied there was a picture in the January city council work session packet. Hansen indicated it was on the city website for a time as well.

New Business

None at this time.

Reports

A. Recreation Director

Windschitl reported two new parttime caretaker staff were hired for Murzyn Hall. They both started a couple of weeks ago. The summer park programs began the second session and participation numbers are good. The Men's softball has three rainout games to make up. The Senior Citizen Active Agers program has offered a lot of great trips and programs. In a future meeting he will have Candy Lack, the coordinator, attend with an update. Saefke added that Windschitl grilled hamburgers this week for their Christmas in July BBQ.

B. Public Works Director

Hansen reported that immediately following this meeting they will move into an open house for a permanent soccer field. This is the first public outreach to get input for soccer field needs in Columbia Heights. He stated it would be beneficial if the members could stay for the meeting. Consultants from WSB will be leading the meeting and we have used that company for park planning over many years. They will develop the park plan overall. The emphasis is to hear what the public is thinking regarding a soccer field.

Hansen indicated Cullen received over fifty applications for an open position for a parks maintenance worker. He is interviewing eighteen people who meet the qualifications. There has been a full staff of seasonal employees and many will be leaving in the next few weeks.

Lastly, Hansen has submitted his retirement notice. Cullen will be taking over as Public Works Director. Hansen's last day will be September 12 and for the remainder of the year assisting on special projects until the end of 2025

C. Commission Members

Eisenbise asked if the camera at Silver Lake Beach is still there and why is there a generator one, or mobile one there. Cullen indicated the mobile camera units are moved around town. Hansen replied there are two mobile units mounted

on generators. They are often used as deterrents where problems have started to manifest. Those do not stay at any one location for a long amount of time. Police will move those around as needed. There is a permanent camera mounted at the Silver Lake boat landing.

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

Macko adjourned the meeting at 6:30 pm.
Deanna Saefke, Recreation Secretary