



Park & Recreation Commission Minutes of the Meeting
John P Murzyn Hall, Senior Center – 530 Mill Street
September 28, 2022

Call to Order/Roll Call

Tom Greenhalgh called the meeting to order at 5:42 pm

Members present: Sean Clerkin, Tom Greenhalgh, Dayna Gulley, Rachel James

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

Consent Agenda

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

Letters and Requests

Windschitl indicated the letter of request was written by former City employee, Mike O'Reilly, current employee Mike Pyka, and Tony Rendell asking to waive the rental fee for a banquet honoring Todd Estrem from Tasty Pizza. Staff recommends waiving the fee for this event on Wednesday, October 19. James confirmed that the group is asking to use the main hall of Murzyn Hall. Windschitl replied yes.

Motion by S Clerkin, second by Gulley, to waive the fee for the use of John P Murzyn Hall to honor Todd Estrem on Wednesday October 19. Upon vote: All ayes. **Motion Carried.**

Old Business

5. Staff will give an update on the Capital Improvement Plan for Parks.

Hansen indicated there isn't a lot of information to update. The Park & Recreation Commission completed an updated in 2018-2019. Hansen has updated that plan for inflationary numbers. Staff are getting a few proposals for a consultant to review and modify the costs estimates that were developed by the Park & Recreation Commission and updated by staff. This information would be used to work with the financial consultant to report back to the city council to then consider any park bonding.

Greenhalgh asked if the splash pad is closed. Hansen replied yes, it runs from the Memorial Day to Labor Day holiday weekends. Greenhalgh asked if the usage was up or down. Hansen replied he was unaware of the numbers. S Clerkin replied the splash pad is always very busy.

James asked if by the end of the year an updated Capital Improvement Plan for Parks will be presented to the city council. Hansen replied no, it would be brought to the Park & Recreation Commission first.

6. Minnesota Skateparks examples packet from residents and a letter of support from Senator Kunesh and Representative Feist.

Abraham Zeimet told the Commission that they skateboard and are in favor of a skate park in Columbia Heights. James asked where Zeimet usually skates. Zeimet replied their parents drive to other cities. Abraham's father Nick Zeimet replied they go to Andover, Shoreview, and northeast Minneapolis for the most common places.

Greta Solem, Youth Commission Member, she and another member are in attendance to bring information back to the Youth Commission after the meeting. Solem would like to see things in the community for youth to participate in and also get them outside more. S Clerkin asked if there is a semi master plan of what they are looking to have for a skate park, or a size. Nathan Roberts, Director of Community Engagement at First Lutheran Church, replied there are a lot of kids who skate in their afterschool program. The kids typically skate in the gym, garage, and parking lot. There isn't a structured place for people to skateboard and they were finding that a lot of youth were skateboarding in other people's property, in alleys, and in busy parking lots. In discussing possible solutions Roberts asked youth why they are not going to skate parks. The overwhelming response was that the closest skate park is a drive away and majority of the youth do not have a license or do not have rides. Roberts began working with City of Skate about possible skate park styles. The recommended size is 12,000 square feet with an approximate cost of \$500,000 to \$600,000. This size is recommended for the ability of all levels to use the area and not just have more experienced boarders take over a small park. Gulley asked if you can section off areas of the skate park for different levels of experience or ages. James replied that it is similar to the playground equipment where there is a smaller area with a sign that indicates the area is for smaller kids or inexperienced users. Roberts indicated the recommended size is similar to the Burnsville skatepark example. He indicated the City of St Louis Park installed a smaller skatepark it doesn't meet the needs of the community. Greenhalgh pointed out that in the attached information packet it is stated the skatepark would be for the community and surrounding areas. He asked if that means the St Louis Park skatepark isn't big enough because it draws from a thirty-mile radius of other communities. Roberts replied yes and as the students in attendance indicated they are driving to other cities for a skatepark. Because skateparks are open to everyone you will get Columbia Heights kids and kids from other communities using the park. Gulley asked if there is a skatepark in St Anthony. James replied yes, it is called a pocket park which is a smaller size skatepark. She does know of several high schoolers that go to that park.

Roberts introduced Paul Forsline the Executive Director from City of Skate. He gave some history on the City of Skate program and working with state legislators for funding. Forsline indicated by having a skatepark there is an opportunity for unprogrammed experiences for youth and adults. The skateparks become a social center much like pools and ice arenas. The key is to create a skatepark and create it well. A concrete park is imperative for longevity. A 12,000 square foot park will accommodate 30-40 skaters at one time when it is designed well. Forsline indicated there is a list of thirty-five communities across the state that are trying to build skateparks. The number one issue is funding and that is why the group is at the state capital. He stated that while it seems like a big upfront cost, \$600,000, but if you look at the fact that there is not any ongoing maintenance to it long-term this should be an asset that last twenty with minimal maintenance and program costs.

Greenhalgh asked if someone is injured while skating who is liable? Forsline replied Columbia Heights is not liable. The League of Minnesota Cities just changed their restrictions on skateparks regarding heights on some of the features and are no longer limiting skateparks. The League has found that they had no lawsuits. Skating is an at-risk activity. The City is encouraged to post signs encouraging wearing helmets and pads and to skate to your ability. This is a known risk activity just like riding on a bike trail or using the ice rink.

S Clerkin asked Forsline if when they are speaking with state government officials, is that to find funding mechanisms because a small city like Columbia Heights doesn't have a lot of money. Forsline replied that is exactly what they are doing. He indicated the last bonding period with the State was asking for fifteen million dollars, there were three stages of grants, and the minimum matching grant was for \$350,000.

Greenhalgh asked where there is available space for a skatepark. Hansen replied the last discussion by the Park and Recreation Commission the two parks identified were Huset Park and the periphery of Ramsdell Park which

is not city owned land but owned by the School District, on the corner of 49th Street and Jefferson Street. One thing to keep in mind is available parking for users of the skatepark. S Clerkin replied the more difficult item is space for a skatepark including vehicle parking. Hansen replied yes. With any of the existing city parks there isn't room for installing a skatepark without removing something else. Hansen indicated the criteria when siting for a skatepark the parking is one of the primary concerns and then available land to support it. Solem reported during one of the Youth Commission meetings they were discussing the current city hall building and that it would eventually be removed, she asked if that would be a potential space for a skatepark. Hansen replied in the short-term the building will not be coming down; it is unknown how long the building will remain there. Siting wise, Hansen doesn't know if having a skatepark in that location on 40th Street is the best use of that site as it could be redeveloped for other usage. Considering the traffic on 40th it might now be the best location for a park. James indicated the discussion of parking is very important. She also wants to consider the community desire for soccer fields and parking needs to be considered for that. James is in favor of redesigning some of the amenities in the existing city parks. This may include consolidating the number of ice rinks, or ballfields so those are not being removed completely but we are making room for the popular sports of today. She loves the idea of the skatepark location near Ramsdell Park because of its proximity to the High School. James is in favor of staff determining the best location for a skatepark. She suggests that the Commission send a recommendation to the City Council that we are in favor of a skatepark, knowing that the City Council will be in charge of bonding and finding money for the project. S Clerkin mentioned soccer fields are in the master plan. Hansen replied yes there is a full-size soccer field in the Huset Park master plan, there are overlays in the master plans at some of the other parks. Forsline added that when you are siting for a skatepark you want to have visibility. You want to show the community that you value the youth, you value recreation, and it is also a deterrent for any problems.

Bourgeois asked Hansen to discuss the process when the capital numbers are received and how the park development plans will work in regard to public engagement. It is important to see if the current master park plans reflect what the community wants or are there things that need to be traded between parks. Hansen replied any time work has been done in a park we use what is called a master plan process. A city-wide master plan including all of the parks has not been conducted because of lack of funding to do all of the parks. There has been funding to complete one or two parks at a time. A primary component in the master plan process is engaging the community around the park and getting their feedback. In terms of working on all remaining parks, and complete the entire park system, this is not something that would be done in a single year. We don't have the capacity to do that. So, we would look at putting together bonding so we would have the revenue to do that. This would probably be over a three-year period and is tentative. Hansen indicated work has been completed on city parks since 2007 and stopped in 2016 or 2018 with LaBelle Park. Currently staff are trying to identify what will take the main dollar perspective to complete the park system and then bring the information forward to the City Council. The Council will make the determination if they want to issue bonds for the remaining revenue for parks. Even with available revenue there is a master planning process and the design process to go through which is at least a twelve-month process. The order of which park is done would need to be determined. If this process were to move rapidly it wouldn't be until 2024 that any dirt would be moved and that is an aggressive outlook. Bourgeois added one more element to the master plan process is to ensure that with each park we have the involvement of the neighbors with the neighborhood parks. Huset Park for example is a city-wide park because it is so large, is to engage the community as a whole for the vision of what needs to be in the park. That process takes time and money, but she believes that is money well spent.

S Clerkin would like to send a recommendation to the City Council to consider the addition of a skate park. Bourgeois indicated when the updated capital list is presented to the City Council it will be presented to the Commission as well, and a skate park could be added to that list. The dollar amount would then be included for the discussion. Then if the grant money becomes available a skatepark would be much more attainable.

Buesgens indicated when most of the parks were built, there weren't as many cars and parking needs to be added to all the parks but doesn't want to see parking as a deterrent for the addition of a skatepark. Clerkin replied he had brought up the need for additional parking at the previous meeting and was told it is being considered and is in some of the master park plans. Ziemet replied they think a skatepark is a good idea and there should be some rules set for how people use the park. They would like to see their family be able to skate near their home and more often, instead of having to have their parent's drive them to another city.

Marquez Simula, attending as a citizen, asked if the Master Park Plan is an overall vision for the entire city but is it meant as a view per park. Hansen replied per park. Marquez Simula asked if there is an overall vision for the whole city for the parks. It would give the order in which park was being worked on next and give the community a whole map. Hansen replied the overall vision is very broad and will be in the cities 2040 Comp Plan. The Capital Improvement Plan that the Commission worked on and completed in 2019, this effort is being done a little differently. Some cities do a master plan upfront and invest funds right away because it does cost a lot of money, especially to do a city-wide plan. In our situation we do not have any available funding to invest in the parks. If the City Council elects to fund parks at any level, they choose then we would go through that master plan process and also develop a schedule for the order in which park would be worked on. Marquez Simula asked even without available funding could there be a schedule of what order parks would be worked on. Hansen replied if funding was available a plan would be developed. As stated early not all of the parks would be able to be under construction in the same year. Fridley and Coon Rapids bonded for funding over time to work on their park systems. Marquez Simula stated it is nice to see that other cities are doing the process as a beneficial way to figure out what is needed, but you have to invest in it to be able to do that. S Clerkin indicated most of our funding comes from development within the city. Hansen replied that is how it is currently setup.

Buesgens indicated when bonding is hopefully goes through, she would like to see various types of community outreach. She has spoken with many residents who are unaware of meetings or how to get their opinions heard and many of them are interested in playing soccer. She asked if the Commission could play a role in the outreach process or does it need to be hired out. Hansen replied we would want to zero in more on the best way to accomplish reaching the residents near each particular park. Buesgens asked if the Commission members can play a role in the outreach. Bourgeois replied the Commission can play a role, but we wouldn't rely solely on them. She would work with Hansen, and the Communications staff to offer more options like online, door knocking, holding public meetings, and social media. She fully understands that there are people who will never attend a public meeting and it is the job of the staff to figure out how those voices are heard. Staff realize language can also be an issue and they are talking about how to address those barriers. Marquez Simula mentioned there has been events in other cities where a table is staffed by commission members who know a lot more about the situation and can speak as a fellow resident on the topic. It also offers another way for commission members to volunteer in more ways than just being at meetings. James mentioned concerns with surveying only the neighborhood around each city park because there may not be a large population of soccer players living around the park that would best fit a soccer field but that doesn't mean the need of the community isn't there. She loves the idea of a whole city-wide survey because some of the amenities take up a lot of space. James agrees that the Commission can bring forward a recommendation to the City Council and a motion to say we are in support of a skatepark as the Council and Staff are working towards the financial goals. There are four hundred signatures on the petition for a skatepark. It would be helpful for those people to see some kind of movement from this Commission. Greenhalgh sees the two biggest obstacles as space and financing. He agrees a pocket one is not worth spending money on it. Greenhalgh indicated his biggest concern initially was regarding insurance. Roberts mentioned one of the most effective ways to reach people is to go directly to the schools and have a table with information because kids have opinions, but you need to meet them part way. He stated talking with teachers is valuable as well because they often know what their students

like to do.

Motion by James, second by S Clerkin, to create a recommendation statement of support that the City Council and Staff include a skatepark in the general plans for the City. Upon vote: All ayes. **Motion Carried**

Greenhalgh indicated this could take three to five years to get something built so the youth in attendance of the meeting may have younger siblings that will enjoy this park more than they will. Roberts stated that the parks currently used for skating were built because other people worked on them.

New Business

James indicated there are residents in attendance who would like to discuss soccer fields. The resident indicated they have lived in the city for many years. Soccer is an activity that many cultures play. He feels it is important for the city to provide activities for the young people. In Huset Park he only sees two goals. He feels it would be better to get soccer nets out earlier. If revenue could be generated a dome would bring people into our city from all over. Solem replied it is a big idea to have a dome and her school uses a dome for soccer, track and a lot of spring sports. Marquez Simula added she attends Huset Park on Saturdays and Sundays when there can be eighty youth playing soccer, using the playground, and adults hanging out. She indicated if there was an intentional soccer field the potential could be so much more for youth and adults. This is a huge community gathering and many people come to Columbia Heights from other cities which does bring in revenue at our businesses. S Clerkin replied it is in the Huset Park Master Plan to have a full-size soccer field. James asked if the master plan for Huset Park includes lights. Windschitl replied no. He asked what happens to the High School football field when no one is using it. On the weekends is it empty. One of the residents replied it is closed. Windschitl replied that is a waste of space to sit empty. There was a field behind Columbia Academy. Buesgens added the soccer teams for boys and girls at the High School are full with waiting lists. She saw fields being used on the weekends. Windschitl replied the Recreation program has soccer for 1st & 2nd grades, 3rd & 4th grades, and 5th & 6th grades and they use three areas at Huset Park. These are fall use only and the same areas are used for softball and baseball. Buesgens has received comments on how the fields look different for baseball and softball versus the poor condition of the soccer areas. People want to see all sports treated equally. Windschitl replied that with developing all of the different parks, irrigation is something that needs to be looked at. In the original Huset Park Master Plan, the idea was to use the water from the splash pad for irrigation in the fields. S Clerkin asked if all of the grass is treated with fertilizer or just the ballfields. Windschitl replied it was an every other year plan for certain parks and just the athletic fields. A resident asked why the soccer goals can't be put out in the summer. Windschitl replied the reason why they are not is because the same areas overlap for baseball and softball. There isn't enough greenspace to have both at the same time. That is why soccer is a fall sport. It depends on the year on how many teams are signed up for baseball and softball. Windschitl has helped the Fridley Heights Soccer Association with a field and they have not liked it due to lack of irrigation. He replied that soccer goals could be in the far east area of Huset Park east, but there are large drains in the middle of the field also. James replied that would be great to setup goals in the summer. Windschitl replied that could be done and will check with Hansen on that for next year. A resident indicated the parking lot at Huset is really bad, kids can't ride their bikes across it, the basketball hoop is bad, and the playground on the East side is not good. S Clerkin agreed the parking lot needs to be redone. Greenhalgh would love to see all of it done and it is a money issue. Windschitl replied the master plan has the whole park being redone, and will need to be reevaluated for the current of the community. He believes the thinking was not to spend the money on redoing the parking lots because when the master plan has funding the layout of the whole park will change.

Reports

A. Recreation Director

Windschitl reported the City Council approved an additional \$12,000 for the rec van replacement. He ordered a new van in 2021 and Ford canceled the order in 2022 and are now making the city reorder the van at the current pricing. The Murzyn Hall boiler had issues at the end of the season, repairs were made yesterday for \$3,000 to \$4,000. Over a weekend one of the lower level windows was broken. Staff are unaware of when the brake occurred. That window was replaced yesterday. The adult softball fall league is underway. The only issue is that the lights no longer function at Huset East field 5. Windschitl has contracted with the City of Fridley to rent a field in Fridley.

B. Public Works Director/City Engineer

None at this time.

C. Commission Members

S Clerkin thanked the youth in attendance of the meeting. James is thankful for the citizens who advocated for a soccer field and skateparks.

Greenhalgh adjourned the meeting at 6:51 pm.

Deanna Saefke, Recreation Secretary