



**Park & Recreation Commission Minutes of the Meeting**  
**Shared Vision Room, City Hall 3989 Central Ave NE**  
**July 24, 2024**

---

**Call to Order/Roll Call**

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

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

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**

Eisenbise indicated the incorrect month of the park's activity was included in the agenda packet. Saefke indicated the correct month will be in the next month's agenda packet. Eisenbise asked about the line item on page 10 for the total expenditures for parks on seasonal time is only at 35% and is wondering if that is typical. Hansen replied that much of the staff time is seasonal and this time of year there is some work that requires overtime. There could be other expenditures that finance has not posted yet. Traditionally at the end of the year the general fund supported budgets will be between 97% and 103%. Overtime can include seasonal maintenance such as grass cutting but also includes snowplowing. Hansen replied he is happy to see a 35% number as opposed to a higher number at this time of the year. Eisenbise indicated this is good insight to see that there is enough staff, or if there would have been missing opportunities there.

Eisenbise asked on page 14 there is zero dollars spent on uniforms. Windschitl replied the majority of youth athletic uniforms are spent out of the 881-donation account, this is where the CH Athletic Booster donations go into, and they give about \$27,000 annually.

Ostergaard asked what the budget year is. Hansen replied it is the calendar year.

**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 indicated he has been speaking with various Lions Club members regarding a sponsorship for the sport court. He stated the next official meeting will be in August and will bring it up at that time. The people he has brought it up to like the idea of having the Lions be a sponsor on the project. Ostergaard asked if donation

money is just needed for the concrete only. Hansen replied just cash in general. The grant process is really well laid out on the steps to take regarding donations. He indicated the total cost is around \$250,000 and most of that is a cost to the city. Asking for concrete donations is just an easy, visible piece of the project. There is a public art component that a separate grant pays for. That is estimated at a \$40,000 - \$50,000 range. Whatever can be generated from donations will be great. Staff will be reaching out to our concrete suppliers as they have some philanthropic programs. Ostergaard asked if the city could fundraise as a public agency. Hansen replied no. It would need to be done by private citizens. He stated if any civic group is willing to give donations in any amount will really help. Saefke reported that Getner will be meeting with the fitness court people next week. Those people are very hands on during the process and give direction on what steps to take next. Ostergaard asked when the fitness court will be announced to the public. Hansen replied a few more details need to be confirmed at the location, so more information would be released over the course of the winter. Ostergaard replied it will be easier to fundraise once there is public information. Eisenbise asked Ostergaard if she received the cheat sheet email from Getner. She replied yes. Eisenbise indicated the videos in that email could be shared for fundraising.

Ostergaard asked for an update on the Public Works building and if there are plans for a new facility. Hansen proceeded to give some background in that the public works facility was built in 1971. While it is only fifty years old, it is due to the quality and type of construction used. A lot of the steel reinforcing rebar is severely corroded. This is found on the structural floor, the ceiling, and all of the columns. Staff went through the process with the city council and conducted a facilities analysis; it was concluded that the facility needs to be replaced. At that time, it some cursory costs estimates were 25 million to replace the building. Staff looked at funding opportunities. The State of Minnesota issues bonds every other year for state institutions and for public entities, cities, counties, tribal entities and so on. The city applied for a state bond. The legislature this year did not give out any bonding. Staff are trying to determine if bonding will come back in 2025, staff will keep in contact with our legislators and apply for the next chance of bonding in 2026. Applications were submitted through the Federal opportunities, through our congressional leaders; Ilhan Omar, Tina Smith, and Amy Klobuchar, for 9 million; the state bond was for 12 million. Staff will continue to apply for funding, but the project will not move forward without receiving funding. We realize that the city of Columbia Heights could not bond for 25 million and it would be way too much of a burden for taxpayers. Now, staff are doing preliminary plans, the city did buy the lot that was used for vehicle storage behind the public works area so there is a much better layout. The hope is to get at least half of the building paid for from other sources, if not more. Hansen indicated staff are working on an updated site layout and after that concludes a preliminary plan will be made so that when funding is secured the process can get started. Harzallah asked if there would be a 20-30% tax increase. Hansen replied not necessarily. Specifically, to the building, if the full amount was bonded for within the city, than yes it would be that high. If at least half of the cost is paid for from outside sources then there are other ways to cover the costs without a large burden to the citizens. Harzallah asked if there is a fear that the longer the project is delayed that the costs will increase. Hansen replied always. Prices typically do not decrease. Take City Hall for example, from the time it was bid until the time it was built there was a 20% increase.

### **New Business**

Annual work plan for the Park & Recreation Commission. Macko opened the item for discussion among the members. Ostergaard indicated it would be helpful for new members to see a whole years' worth of what the current expectations are for the commission. What are the goals to accomplish. When someone joins it is a little unknown as to what their role is and where or how they can make a difference. What is the ability of this commission. Where can a member be helpful to staff or others. How can we make sure that the work is happening, and members know what to expect month after month. Then some work can be done in between the meetings. Establishing goals and expectations will keep everyone on the same page and have forward

progress. It is a challenge to understand where and how the members are making a difference for the community. For example, when a resident attends the meeting asking for a fence around the pickleball court, at what point in the work that they are doing do they push for a fence around the court? Is there a time in the year where things need to be discussed before the budget is approved to discuss other items. Macko commented a plan or an outline that could be followed. Eisenbise stated at the previous meeting a community member came in with a lot of asks. What is the purpose of them attending the meeting and what do they do with that information. Ostergaard replied that she doesn't like feeling like a dead end and doesn't know where are the levers to push or process of what do to next. Getting items into the Comprehensive Park Plan would be helpful when a citizen is asking for an amenity such as a dog park and the members could easily respond that there is a plan in place for such items.

Ostergaard would also like to see some kind of educational component at each meeting. Even if it is another staff member explaining what they do in their job. At one meeting it was discussed to potentially have a member from Fridley to come and discuss the process putting together their park plan. She has some connections for people who specialize in community engagement. All of these things would help equip the commission be better public support members. Macko often tells people when they bring park issues or items up to him that they should attend a meeting. He can pass along their comments, but it is more meaningful when they have the passion for item and discuss it themselves. When the citizen attended last month's meeting you could feel her energy and passion for the items discussed. He agrees with the question of how the Commission is supposed to reply to those situations. Eisenbise indicated there was no discussion or follow-up after the citizen left. Harzallah indicated looking at the 2040 Plan, which includes the park plan, the way he sees it our mandates covers two things. The day to day, month to month of decisions that staff present to the Commission regarding things like park shelter rentals. The other aspect is looking towards achieving the objectives based on the guide that was given to them based on the master park plan. Chipping away at the Comprehensive Plan is a way to accomplish small goals along the way. Community engagement can really come into play and members can invite people to attend meetings.

Hansen replied the city has several advisory commissions and the Park and Recreation Commission is one of them. They advise largely to the general public as far as it relates to what they have done with park planning. Then they also advise the City Council. None of the advisory commissions have budget authority, ultimately that all falls on the City Council. Columbia Heights parks were largely built in the late 60s and 70s. There was a lot of development occurring or finishing and there was a lot of remanent land. That is mostly where the parks ended up going. Since that time there wasn't major investments made into the parks. In 2008 staff looked at ways to reinvest and budget for the redevelopment of parks. With limited funds staff took the redevelopment process on a park by park basis and reinvested in six or six and half parks for four to five million dollars. The best step for the commission to take at this time is to update the park development plan. Not the parks comprehensive plan but the park plan that the commission updates. It looks at what amenities are currently in the parks and then look at what we want the parks to be. If the commission wants a specific amenity in the park staff will look at what makes sense either from past park planning or what is feasible at a specific location. If the group goes through this process Hansen believes that they will get to a useful park plan which is then brought forward for cost estimating. This was done in 2018-2019. At that time it was about 13 to 18 million to update the park system but the cost will be higher in today's market. One question is if we want to engage a consultant for this process. Hansen reiterated that getting a park plan completed will give direction. Is the city council in support of getting funding for the parks. Based on the last strategic planning sessions, yes they are. It is the number two goal, aside from public works. However, there isn't a lot of grant money out there for major park redevelopment, particularly for the local seven county area. Another strategic planning will be held with the city council in 2025.

Ostergaard replied it is important to have this kind of history somewhere for the public to see so that when commission members are discussing the parks or get approached by citizens they can refer them to the website for information. She also believes the Sustainability Commission would offer a good perspective. Does this Commission create a recommendation of what they would like to see in the parks and that recommendation would go to the city council. How does this work. Hansen replied the members are representing the community and indicate to staff what is important within the park system. The park plan really needs to be updated and that will indicate what the process looks like. Should one or two parks be completed when funding is acquired or do they want to wait until funding is available for the whole park system. Staff will work on updating the park plan and bring it forward to the commission section by section for review and guidance. Is this a six month process, that is unsure but we will work on it month by month. Ostergaard indicated a timeline would be good looking from April to April, based on their terms. Hansen replied it is a good idea to visit the parks and hold a meeting at one of the parks each month. For example, Ostrander Park is one of our problem areas due to the land conditions and it is important to understand the history. Ostergaard stated having a meeting at a different park each month would be great so regular business can be discussed and then a designated amount of time for education and history on that park, and then work on updating the park plan. Hansen reported that we do have fifteen parks so we can also cover more than one park using Google Maps or Anoka County online. It is great to get out in the parks because staff cannot see everything either. There is a lot of interest in soccer fields right now, and that is great, but you have to get to the area and lay it out. The ground has to be in appropriate conditions to play on. At Gauvitte there were a lot of holes in the field area that needed to be repaired before use. Another role with the Commission is to assess the existing conditions and then decide what amenities are desired. A consultant is hired to take that information and develop ideas before getting community engagement. This is a huge effort to take on all parks at one time. Meetings are held regarding three or four parks in one night. Parks are one item that you need community involvement on. People view the parks as their own area. Can you do this process early, yes, but he hates to start this without available funding. The city council has a lot of funding needs to assess right now. Ostergaard gave the example of trying to explain to a resident as to why the sport court is being installed before other desired amenities are getting addressed. Having a plan with an answer regarding funding or a timeline will be easier to explain the process to others. Hansen replied this is a good point and when the parks were originally developed they were not fully planned. For one example there would be a skating rink, but the warming house would be further away, so it doesn't feel like it was properly planned out.

Ostergaard would like to see this plan on paper. Macko asked if she means an overlay. Ostergaard replied more of an outline and timeline of what will be worked on at that time. Harzallah stated moving forward they could create a schedule for the next three or four months. The first thing is having a physical timeline, so the group has something to look at and follow. The second is that they could create a schedule right now for the next three to four months on where the group will meet. We could start at McKenna or Prestemon and at each meeting we can also have further discussion on the current document. Then in December meet at City Hall to review the parks discussed and make decisions about future improvements at that time. He feels this is something they can accomplish and is also reasonable for staff. Macko replied the commission held a meeting at Keyes Park and he felt it was beneficial to see the facility firsthand. Eisenbise indicated Silver Lake Beach would be a good location. Perez Umphress agrees that she is only familiar with the park by her house. Being able to explain to people what park amenities are being prioritized and why is something that she struggles with as well. Most people do not grasp the concept that you need to prioritize what can be accomplished at any given time.

Eisenbise asked what are the top three problem parks. Hansen replied wouldn't say the work problem but would use challenge areas. Each park has unique issues. Ostrander was mentioned but the only tennis court is at

Sullivan and is past its usage, needing to be torn out. Staff tried to get that done this year and it just couldn't happen. The courts have not lasted as long as expected because it is on fill. Before Hansen start at the city Sullivan Lake was dredged and a lot of that muck, fine grain sand material was not hauled out and was buried right where the tennis courts are. That land is susceptible to frost heaving. Even though the posts are in four feet deep of concrete it still moves. If you look park by park you can find issues at each one. Parking can be a question at each park, how many spaces do you need, well, that depends on what amenities you put there. For example, if the Commission and the City Council elects to put in a dog park do you really need expanded or just existing parking. One needs to think about the use; is that intended for the city or for a specific area. There will be people that see it who do not live in the city and will go there. Previous thoughts were to put a dog park at Prestemon Park. There are two parking lots and some natural land that could be used. Another issue is that a lot of our park buildings need to be torn down. The Park & Recreation Commission toured the building in 2017, 2018, and 2019. Now many of the park buildings are used for storage. Prestemon Park used to have a skating rink, and the building was a warming house but located so far away from the rink. Some of the shelters have issues as well. People do not clean up after themselves, the shelters are tagged with graffiti, and even bird nests are constant things that need to be addressed. Shelters are nice and people like them, but we need to look at what is being placed within the parks, should there be a concentration at certain parks instead of similar items at every park. Stormwater treatment needs to be done at every park if there is any level of development. This is a very expensive process. If you disturb any more than one acre all of the rules of the watershed kick in. Staff have acquired some grant funding to help with stormwater treatment.

Macko suggested meeting at Sullivan Lake Park to discuss the layout of the fitness court because that is the most concrete thing we have in front of us. It would be a good starting point. They could also look at the tennis court. Marquez Simula suggested meeting at Huset Park West in September or October because there will be a new polish sculpture. The unveiling date is September 21. It is a seventeen-foot tall, stainless steel sculpture. The sculpture is being given to the city for free, the city is then providing the park space, the design of the foundation and footing, the concrete work and lighting. The sculpture is being paid for by the Polish government, the PACIM group and Sister Cities group of Columbia Heights. The sculpture has an original one in Lomianki Poland. It is in honor of a World War II plane that was shot down and crashed in Lomianki. One of our residents' brothers, who grew up in northeast Minneapolis did in that crash. It crashed in a field but now there is a school there. PACIM had five other locations between western Wisconsin and Minnesota. They choose Columbia Heights. Huset Park West was a better location than Lomianki Park because of its central location. This unveiling is going to be a huge international, diplomatic event.

Eisenbise likes the idea of having a destination for each of these meetings so there is a specific agenda. In September we can go to Huset Park to see the new sculpture and any other updates on the park. For this next month we will go to Sullivan to discuss the sport court and tennis courts. Ostergaard added also looking at the Medtronic redevelopment at Sullivan. Eisenbise asked what the group wants to do in October. Macko suggested Prestemon Park with some of the small updates like the pickleball court and disc golf baskets being installed. McKenna is a good idea. Eisenbise replied Silver Lake Beach is a good idea and feels it needs new playground equipment and hates the building there. If we go to Prestemon is there movement there or is it just to look at the updates. Macko replied he has had residents bring items up to him such as a fence around the pickleball court and adding pads or expanding the disc golf area. Eisenbise asked if Prestemon Park could still hold a dog park. Hansen replied it requires the building to be torn down. Ostergaard replied she is happy to work on a layout for future meetings. Hansen replied staff will work on getting a plan together.

Ostergaard offered kudos to the recreation staff. The summer park programs are wonderful. Her kids are in many programs, and they are having a great time. The Dyno Hites staff are so good with the kids and the t-ball

program is going very well. The way the staff treat the kids and engage with them is hard to come by. Windschitl replied that is great to hear and we have a lot of summer staff returning this year. We were fortunate enough to convince the City Council to increase the hourly wages a little so that we could compete with other cities. Some of the returning staff were not planning to come back originally but because we could offer a little higher hourly wage, he thinks that made a difference. It has been a great summer. Harzallah stated even the Public Works seasonal staff have been really nice people. He has seen the workers in the parks, and they have done a good job cleaning the parks. Hansen replied they have had good seasonal workers this year.

## **Reports**

### **A. Recreation Director**

Windschitl reported the youth summer programs have been going really well and a lot of that is attributed to the seasonal staff. They are really trustworthy people, and it has been fun to watch the program excel and get to where it is this summer. The summer adult softball has been going really well despite a lot of rainouts. There have been some issues at Murzyn Hall with the security service for events. He researched other companies to give us a bid. It is very difficult to find officers now and that is why we are not having officers show up at some of our events. Staff will continue to monitor the situation. This is a big company that we work with, G4S. Harzallah asked what kind of things the security are officers asked to do. Windschitl replied they are asked to monitor the events like weddings or quinceanera birthday party and the guests are following the policies. Harzallah stated they are maintaining the perimeter or inside. Windschitl replied both. Harzallah asked one guard, armed or unarmed. Windschitl replied one guard, unarmed, and we have one staff person working the entire event. Harzallah asked if we charge around \$30 per hour. Windschitl replied \$35 per hour. If anyone has contacts or ideas of other companies to let staff know. Ostergaard replied the school district uses a security company. Windschitl replied he thinks he spoke to that company in the past but is willing to reach out to them again. Saefke replied many places she goes to use sheriffs or county officers. Previously CSOs from the CHPD were used but that was more expensive than a private security company.

Windschitl reported receiving a phone call from a resident a few weeks ago with concerns regarding Sullivan Park, some of which have already been discussed. One concern was why are the nets not up at the tennis court and it isn't being used. The resident also mentioned the homeless living under the shelter and around Huset Park. Windschitl did pass that concern onto the police department, and they are addressing the situation.

Windschitl has received a lot of good comments on the Jamboree fireworks. Some people said the show was the best they have seen. The city does prepay so we get more product with the show. This company has done a really good job for a number of years, and it is good to work with someone you trust. Ostergaard recently had a conversation with someone regarding having other close cities offer fireworks. The idea was to maybe partner with the City of Fridley and to take turns every other year having a fireworks show. That would be a way for both groups to save money. Eisenbise attended the Red, White, and Boom event and thought Columbia Heights was better. Harzallah also attended both and thought ours was better.

### **B. Public Works Director**

Hansen reported the grass continues to grow and staff are busy cutting it and maintaining the parks. Since members brought up Silver Lake Beach he wanted to mention there is an active lake association there. They are concerned with the water quality and there currently is blue green algae present. It comes and goes. Staff researched the problem and do have a protocol for posting it if there are the bacteria. It is an advisory posting because we do not enforce it and people swim at their own risk there. Ramsey County monitors the lake and water quality.

### **C. Commission Members**

Eisenbise reported that she has a lot of ideas that she would like to see in our parks. They may have been discussed in previous years and is sure that others have desires of what they would like to see in the parks. Maybe this could be an email discussion. She wonders what happened with the skate park movement. Hansen replied if that email is sent to staff prior to a meeting that is something that staff can provide a response to the commission and a response for discussion. Many things have been discussed with previous commissions. Eisenbise reported while camping at Baker Park and saw this amazing, simple amphitheater. She is wondering what it would take to install something like that for music in the park. Windschitl replied that music in the park is happening right now at Huset Park. Hansen replied it is nice. Just looking at the photo example there is a cost for sighting the area, the block, footings, how is it safe for people to sit on, using materials to keep the structure intact through the winters. As a quick estimate for what is shown in the photos, maybe \$80,000 to \$150,000. Windschitl replied the county should build something like that at Kordiak Park.

Ostergaard asked when the time comes where the commission has items they want to move forward within the parks how do they go about making recommendations. How do they help push things forward. Hansen replied from a procedural perspective, once the commission finishes the Park Plan, than do you have priorities, do you want to work on things all at once. We would look at funding resources, we would look at money on hand in the Park Development Fund, and then try to get cursory costs, and then approach the City Council. Is there interest for bonding or is there interest for just doing a few parks at a time.

Harzallah reported having a nice meeting at the recreation office with Windschitl regarding soccer fields. They shared ideas on what is possible for field usage. He has received a strong push from community members for more soccer fields. With summer ending he feels like the opportunity might be ending. Ostergaard indicated people use the fields at McKenna Park and setup their own goals and it seems like a large group or club. Windschitl replied they do not book the park with the city. This same thing happens at Huset Park and even our own youth programs have had issues using the area due to other groups just showing up for the same area. He indicated the city is short on goals. It would be good to come up with a plan for next year for field usage and if there were more goals available. Two small fields could be placed at Gauvitte if some of the trees were removed and still avoided the drain in the middle of the field. They would be good practice fields, but we would need to get goals. One big negative is the parking situation around Gauvitte Park. The number one complaint from that neighborhood is when there are events there and parking is a problem.

Marquez Simula asked if the commission could express any financial needs the members could help to solicit and direct companies or groups to the proper staff. Ostergaard replied yes it would be actionable for the members to work on. Windschitl replied the recreation staff have wrote letters in the past to groups like the VFW or the Lions to sponsor events or specific items during an event like the bounce house or food. Ostergaard solicits a lot of donations on behalf of transit agencies and that is why she is curious on how the city does it. Hansen replied the city does not solicit other companies directly. Windschitl replied there is a donation account and there are certain parameters that need to be met to use that money. Ostergaard would be happy to ask people if ever needed. She would like to know specifically what to say to someone when asking for donations and how it works for that business when they donate to the city.

Perez Umphress indicated visiting the city of Roseville and they have a parks passport. It is a cute resource for people to use and see all of the parks in the whole city. It was available at the library, city hall, and other common areas. Eisenbise replied it sounds similar to an activity at the state fair where you redeem the passport for a prize after visiting the specific areas. Marquez Simula replied the police department has trading cards that

people can collect and get a swag bag when they get all of them. Windschitl reported the police department is hosting an eat and greet next Tuesday from 5-7pm at McKenna Park is people want to attend. They have even invited the volleyball group to attend. Windschitl replied the recreation department will have a table at the event with information for upcoming programs.

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

Macko adjourned the meeting at 8:00 pm.  
Deanna Saefke, Recreation Secretary