



**Park & Recreation Commission Minutes of the Meeting**  
**John P. Murzyn Hall – Senior Center, 530 Mill Street NE**  
**April 27, 2022 - 5:31 pm**

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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, Rachel James, Andy Macko

Staff present: Kelli Bourgeois, City Manager; David Cullen, Street/Park Superintendent; Kevin Hansen, Public Works Director/City Engineer; Sara Ion, City Clerk; Deanna Saefke, Commission Secretary; Keith Windschitl, Recreation Director; Connie Buesgens, Council Representative

Also present: Jerry Hart

1. Introduction of new commission members Dayna Gulley and Andy Macko.
2. City Clerk Sara Ion discussed the Park & Recreation Commission Membership Information and Orientation included in the packet. She mentioned attendance requirements, informing staff if a member is unable to attend a meeting, and social media interactions with regards to open meeting laws. Ion offered her assistance as a resource for any Commission Members.
3. Oath of Office by Dayna Gulley, Rachel James, and Andy Macko.
4. Election of Board Officers.  
**Motion** by S Clerkin, second by James, to appoint Tom Greenhalgh as commission chair. Upon vote: All ayes.  
**Motion Carried.**

**Motion** by Greenhalgh, second by B Clerkin, to appoint Sean Clerkin as commission vice chair. Upon vote: All ayes. **Motion Carried.**

**Consent Agenda**

5. **Motion** by S Clerkin, second by B Clerkin, to approve the minutes from November 17, 2021. Upon vote: All ayes. **Motion Carried.**
6. & 7. **Motion** by S Clerkin, second by Macko, to approve payment of bills. Upon vote: All ayes. **Motion Carried.**

**Letters and Requests**

8. Letter of requests from St. Matthew Church to use McKenna Park from July 24 – 28 for their Vacation Bible School. They are teaming with Hope Community Church, Heights Church, Gloria Dei Lutheran Church, and St. Timothy Lutheran Church.

Windschitl indicated St Matthew Church is requesting the use of McKenna Park from July 24-28. He reminded the Commission of the current rental rates. Depending on the decision of the Commission the charge could be

assessed for a daily fee for 5 days. The group is expecting around 100 attendees and volunteers which would be the resident rate of \$125 per day. St. Matthew is requesting a flat rate of \$200 for the whole event. This is a free event to participate in.

Greenhalgh indicated this is five local churches participating in the event so there will be a lot of residents involved. James asked what level of park maintenance would be needed each day of the event. If the group is not requesting park staff maintenance each day, it could affect the fee. Greenhalgh replied trash pick up might be the only service needed. Hansen replied on a daily basis seasonal staff go to each park to collect trash and where there is a reservation, staff are aware of that. S Clerkin asked if any additional costs would be occurring beyond normal operations. Cullen replied if the operations happen during regular business hours, 7am-3pm it would not be any additional costs. Macko indicated he has previously participated in VBS with St. Matthew, and they were always good about having everything cleaned up each day. S Clerkin asked how people felt about reducing a fee. Gulley replied as long as costs are covered, she doesn't mind reducing the fee.

**Motion** by James, second by Macko, to reduce the park rental fee to \$200 for the five days with a note to the church that the only services will be trash pickup daily. Upon vote: All ayes. **Motion Carried.**

9. Letter of request from a member of the Sullivan family for the residential rate to rent Sullivan Park.

Saefke reported the Sullivan family rents the park every year for a family reunion. They no longer have a family member living in Columbia Heights and with the recent increase in the rental fee they are requesting to always pay the resident rental rate since the park is named after their family member. S Clerkin and Gulley replied they are happy to offer the family a resident rental rate.

**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**

10. Staff will discuss past park improvements and future park projects.

Hansen reported the City of Columbia Heights owns and operates fifteen city parks. Prior to 2008 there wasn't a major investment into the parks since they were built in the 1970's. In 2008 staff began working with the Commission to determine which parks would be worked on and began the master planning process. The master planning process involves the public. Most of the parks with the exception of Huset Park are neighborhood parks. Public meetings are held to gain community input on what the residents would like to see changed from what is currently existing in the park. Park design happens through a consultant. Final input is received from the community on the proposed design. The adopted Master Plan is then recommended from the Park & Recreation Commission to the City Council for approval. At that stage a consultant is hired, and the project is sent out for public bids. The process typically takes two years to complete.

Sullivan and Silver Lake Beach Parks were the first two parks completed. LaBelle, Ramsdell, Huset West, and Keyes Parks have been completed. The limitation at this time is that the Park Development Fund has no funding in it for large projects. A master plan has been started for Wargo Court but there are stipulations for any changes made within that area. Any future park projects are going to be based on available funding.

James asked if the park master plans are available to the public. Hansen replied there is not a completed park master plan but there are individual park master plans. The Park & Recreation Commission completed in 2017-

2018, or in 2018-2019, an update to the Capital Improvement Plan for the parks; that is public information. James asked if that was on the city website. Hansen replied that he didn't think it was. James indicated it would be nice to have that available. Hansen replied that he will get the plan on the website.

### **New Business**

11. Staff will discuss the results from the 2022 Citywide Survey.

Hansen reported the Community Survey was conducted to gauge feedback from a community perspective on things we are doing and some things that the residents feel we as a city should be focusing on. A phone survey was conducted with a minimum of 400 interviews or more. Once a minimum of 400 interviews are conducted the results are considered statistically accurate. 147 questions were included in the survey. Hansen indicated the survey questions and results are available on the city's website.

Hansen reviewed how the parks were represented within the survey. One topic was quality of life. Parks are often a big indicator of quality of life or community. In this survey it was represented in that small town feel and the proximity of where Columbia Heights is located to Minneapolis and other areas; it is a convenient location. Parks and trails were the next highest rated. The next question focused on what people view as the most serious issue facing Columbia Heights. As with a lot of communities the top answer was crime. Street maintenance and infrastructure maintenance also received high feedback. The aging park system came in fairly strong but at the bottom of the key categories, but it is reflected that the community recognizes where we are at in terms of where we should be focusing city efforts. The next question was "What would you recommend doing to improve the quality of life for the community?" Some of the answers were jobs, restaurants, community center, more parks and trails, and updated parks and trails. One other question represented was "How do you feel about what the city currently offers? Is there too much, not enough, or just about right?" There was a long listing but most of the answers were some sort of park reflection. Three quarters of the answers were just about right in terms of what is offered and the quantity. Areas where the community would like to see more offered is in sidewalks, athletic fields, courts, ice rinks, with the major focus on courts, also trails and bikeways. Hansen replied there isn't a strong representation at any of our parks for outdoor courts.

The next question on the survey was "Would you support financing or paying more on your taxes if the city was looking at expanding community services?" There was a strong representation of about three to one that the citizens would be in favor of paying something. The survey results concluded that most people would support paying \$55 per year on their taxes to support the park system. Hansen reported the next step is to figure out what the needs are. In 2019 the cost for the remaining park improvements would need to be significantly increased for today's prices.

Hansen reported one other item that was a strong representation in the survey was a community center. While John P Murzyn Hall serves as our community center it is another aging structure. If you look at community centers in other cities, is that something the residents have an interest in seeing here and do they have enough interest to support funding that kind of project. Hansen indicated the city is doing a facility analysis on John P Murzyn Hall to determine what shape the building is in. The study is almost complete, and results will be brought to the city council. Other Park improvements can be completed but it will take a long time to build up funds. In the past funds were received for park improvements was through redevelopments within the city. Without redevelopment in the city there are no large amounts of funds going into the parks fund. There are small amounts that are used to pay for minor capitol items. For example, each park redevelopment has cost on average between \$500,000 and \$600,000. Current bids on similar projects are up by about 20%. S Clerkin asked for clarification on the city council approval for \$100,000 yearly budget to go into the parks fund. Hansen replied

yes. S Clerkin asked what is being done with that funding. Bourgeois replied the money is going into the Parks Capital Fund, which is different than the Parks Development Fund. The City Council earmarked \$112,000 from tax revenues to the Parks Capital Fund. This amount is meant to build up in the fund for future projects.

Macko asked if the third-party company who conducted the survey took into account the demographics of families, and people without kids. He pointed out there is a difference in cost between installing a playground versus having trails within a park. Other things to consider pricing differences are pickle ball or disc golf. Depending on the type and age of people you are trying to attract to certain areas will determine cost-effective planning measures. Hansen replied one of the goals and the intent of any survey is to have a good representation of your community. The company also had access to the census 2022 demographic data. Bourgeois replied with the 400 survey candidates that participated, Morris Leatherman company made sure to have a statistically representative survey of our population. Age, race, demographics, home ownership versus renters, male/female, and even geographic location within the community. Gulley asked of the 18% not in favor of raising taxes if there were demographic results for that group. Bourgeois replied, no. She thinks it is important to note that the survey was taken at the end of the pandemic and people were not getting back into work as much as they are now. One of the questions asked about people's comfort level financially. There was a large percent of our population that indicated they are not financially comfortable. That impacts how much you are willing or able to pay on your property taxes for other things that are not absolutely essential. James commented that during the presentation of the survey results from Morris and Leatherman the representative stated he rarely sees a city with this much support for funding towards the parks. She thinks that is a wonderful compliment to Public Works and the Parks Department to see people appreciate the facilities. S Clerkin replied that this is the second community survey where the citizens are in favor of park improvements. Gulley asked if the improvements are specifically structural or are they talking about program development as well. Bourgeois replied the survey asked about parks capital projects which really incorporates trails as well. Then there were separate questions regarding recreation and library programming. The survey asked about people use of the programs offered and if there were adequate programs available. Overall, there is a sense of satisfaction with what is being offered, it is the capital side where people see the need for improvements and changes. Bourgeois stated that the community is evolving, and it needs to be looked at how we are changing and evolving to accommodate the changing demographics. Hansen replied that S Clerkin is correct the previous survey conducted was also strongly supported to raise taxes for park improvements. This survey had a higher percentage of support. The previous survey years ago showed about 65% and this time is 78-80% support.

B Clerkin asked how many tennis courts are in the city. Windschitl replied the school district has nice ones that were redone a few years ago and the city has one at Sullivan Park. Hansen reported the courts at Prestemon Park were taken out fifteen years ago. James reported she hears people in the community asking the most about basketball courts, soccer fields, and a skate park. B Clerkin replied the tennis courts can easily be used as pickleball courts. Cullen reported last year the basketball courts were resurfaced at Prestemon Park and the Recreation Department purchased a new basketball hoop. The other half of that court will be dedicated to pickleball. Gulley asked if there are any pickleball leagues or if the court will be used just for pickup games. Windschitl replied there were a lot of requests about three years ago for pickleball and the recreation department offered time at the Hylander Center for pickleball. A lot of adults were requesting it but when it was offered only a few people came and it quickly died out, and then COVID closed the gym.

## **Reports**

### **A. Recreation Director**

Windschitl reported the city hired an architectural firm to conduct a building facility study for John P Murzyn Hall. They are currently working on it and results are expected in a month or two.

The Murzyn Hall bills will reflect some major repairs that have recently been made. The gutter fell off the back of the building and was replaced last week. Some of the major repairs made were the boiler, HVAC, and a major improvement on the wood floor in the main hall. A significant amount of wood was replaced due to cracking at the entryway. The wood floor is reaching the end of its lifespan and we are trying to make it work until a decision is made on the facility study results.

Windschitl indicated the adult softball league started last week. The summer programs will be available next week online for registration. The summer newsletter will go out to the public in mid-May.

Greenhalgh asked about the status of the Hylander Center. Windschitl replied the full open gym is not operational yet. The police department is doing after school open gym for students. Staff were waiting until the mask mandate ended to open it up to the public. Currently the gym is being used for a lot of recreation programming. Youth basketball was held there all winter long. Greenhalgh asked if there will be a limit on the number of people allowed in the gym at one time once it is open to the public. Windschitl replied that will need to be discussed.

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

Hansen reported one of the number one comments from residents is the ability to use trails within the city. There are a couple of trails being developed not within the parks, but within the city. Work is starting on 37<sup>th</sup> Avenue between Central Avenue and Stinson Boulevard. Utilities are being done this year and next year a total reconstruction of the roadway. Part of that reconstruction involves a ten-foot-wide trail on the north side of the road. This will connect Central Avenue over to Main Street. The second reconstruction project in 2023 is 53<sup>rd</sup> Avenue from Central Avenue over to University Avenue and then to Main Street, continuing into Fridley. This will also have a trail on the Columbia Heights side of the street. Gulley asked if sidewalks are considered part of the trail system. Hansen replied on 37<sup>th</sup> there will be a sidewalk on the Minneapolis side and a trail on the other.

Greenhalgh asked about the status of the wading pools and if the city is able to operate them. Hansen replied the wading pools will continue to be open until we are told that we cannot. Greenhalgh asked how often the doggie station bags are checked. Cullen replied staff check them when they are checking trash. Greenhalgh reported the north side of Keyes Park has been out of bags for a week.

Hansen indicated an ongoing issue is having enough seasonal staff. The seasonal staff provide a valuable service because they help to keep up on the turf growing season, trim, help with trash pickup, and pool checks. An ideal staffing in the parks department is eight to ten seasonals and this year there might be two or three only. If anyone knows of someone looking for a job, they need to be eighteen with a valid driver's license. This problem is not unique to Columbia Heights as other cities are experiencing the same issue. James asked if any of the positions could ever be available to 16+. Hansen replied no because of insurance reasons and if they are not 18, they need to be supervised.

Greenhalgh reported a water leak at 1215 44<sup>th</sup> Avenue at the water shutoff in the driveway.

B Clerkin asked with regards to redevelopment of parks, is it ever discussed to give up greenspace to allow for more parking. For example, at McKenna Park where the hockey rink area is used all summer long for volleyball there is only street parking. Hansen replied yes, parking is considered during redevelopment. At McKenna Park there is parking laid out in the master plan. The parking lot would be in the lower portion of the park by the trees in between the building and wading pool.

### **C. Commission Members**

Greenhalgh welcomed the new members.

Gulley reported the Silver Lake Beach building has graffiti on three sides of it. Hansen replied that during the growing season when seasonal staff are there daily, they do catch those types of things, otherwise it can always be reported to Public Works. Sometimes police will want to take pictures of it. Cullen indicated staff are aware of it. A pressure washer with a specific paste is used to remove it and that was delayed due to the weather. Gulley stated it would be a great project to have a joint effort with the school to paint a mural on that building. James replied the community survey indicated people are interested in arts and beatification. She stated a recent Drains to the Lake mural was painted at Silver Lake Beach in the parking lot area.

Buesgens reported MNDOT recently began a study getting feedback from communities along Central and University Avenues, starting at First Street in Minneapolis ending at Northtown. MNDOT gave a presentation to the City Council, and she felt there were things missing. She has formed a committee to get their voices heard regarding things that need to be done along our section of Central Avenue. This study by MNDOT will determine how Central Avenue will be handled in the next ten years. The committee would like to see Central Avenue prioritized as a main street for the safety, mobility, and experience of residents over commuters. MNDOT's research has shown that Central Avenue in its current condition is not safe. Over the past eight years our police department has recorded 387 accidents on Central Avenue and 36 on University Avenue. In the past three weeks there were five accidents between 44<sup>th</sup> and 49<sup>th</sup> Avenues with one fatality. Buesgens indicated a petition was made to collect signatures who live, work, or come into Columbia Heights for various activities or business to present to MNDOT. She informed the Commission of upcoming public meetings June 2<sup>nd</sup> and June 4<sup>th</sup> at 6:30 pm in the Columbia Heights Library Community Room.

Greenhalgh stated that Central Avenue is listed as a highway and is generally passed when doing the speed limit while driving. Buesgens knows that MNDOT has turned a highway into a main street. It has been done in Alexandria, Glenwood, St Peters, and two other cities. Macko asked if most of the accidents are happening during a certain time frame. Buesgens indicated the police department has noticed the accidents occur more often in the evenings, like from 6-9 pm, but they do occur at all times.

Greenhalgh adjourned the meeting at 6:34 pm.  
Deanna Saefke, Recreation Secretary