



NATURAL RESOURCES COMMISSION

Meeting Minutes October 5, 2022
Duluth City Hall, Conference Room 330

I. Call to Order

Chair Lindgren called the meeting to order at 6:05 p.m.

II. Roll Call

Commissioners Present: Lori Dando, Judy Gibbs, Sophia Green, John Lindgren, Mike Schrage, Nancy Schuldt, Tiffany Sprague

Absent: Allison Ray

Others Present: Jim Filby Williams, Kate Kubiak, Allison Brooks

III. Approval of the Agenda

Commissioner Lindgren added an agenda item to Old Business – Parks Levy Discussion. Commissioner Schrage made a motion to accept the addition; seconded by Commissioner Sprague. Unanimously approved.

Commissioner Schrage made a motion to approve the agenda with the addition; seconded by Commissioner Sprague. Unanimously approved.

IV. Approval of the September 7, 2022 Meeting Minutes

Vice Chair Schuldt made a motion to approve the September 7, 2022 meeting minutes as submitted; seconded by Commissioner Schrage. Unanimously approved.

V. New Commissioner Introduction – Lori Dando

Lori Dando attended as the newest appointed commissioner. Commissioner Schrage commented that one vacancy remains. Kubiak will review the current list of applicants and provide an update on the status.

VI. Old Business

A.) Public lands acquisition project update (Kate Kubiak, Jim Filby Williams)

Kubiak and Filby Williams provided an update on the St. Louis County strategic land realignment process. An online map displaying the proposed parcels is available at <https://duluthmn.gov/planning-development/planning-development-news/public-lands-realignment/>. The acquisition process has been highly collaborative with the City Planning department to determine parcels, and segments of parcels, that would be most appropriate and feasible for development or protection in alignment with adopted zoning codes. Likewise, the process has incorporated ongoing engagement with St. Louis County to select the parcels that would be acquired for protection. The transactions are on track to be completed by the end of the year.

After acquisition, the parcels will be designated as one of three types of land. The first category is for parcels that will be integrated into the Duluth Natural Areas Program (DNAP). The second category of parcels are those that are adjacent to existing designated parkland, and these parcel designations will be presented for approval to the Parks and Recreation Commission. The third category remains to be formally determined,



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but it is anticipated that the parcels will be designated for protection of green infrastructure.

Chair Lindgren asked if a map displaying the proposed designations would be provided. Filby Williams responded that a map will be provided and a presentation for approval of the proposed DNAP and green infrastructure designations will be included at a future Natural Resources Commission meeting. An informational presentation of the park designated parcels will be provided as well.

Chair Lindgren asked if the land acquisition process established with these parcels will lay the groundwork for future acquisitions. Filby Williams commented that while there are properties in other project areas that would be beneficial to acquire for protection, there are challenges in terms of ongoing maintenance needs and capacity. Many of the parcels in the current program already have established infrastructure in place. Any potential future acquisitions will likely require renewed and ongoing interdepartmental conversations.

Commissioner Sprague inquired what the timeline for designation of lands to the DNAP program. Filby Williams estimates that, depending on workload, Property Services would be able to complete the acquisitions and DNAP designations in 2023. The parks designations would be completed in portions after that point. Commissioner Sprague asked what type of protections are in place for the parcels before the formal designations are finalized. Filby Williams responded the parcels are purchased with the intent of protection and the grant funding incorporates limits on the parcels. Therefore, the parcels have robust protections in place even without a formal protection designation.

Commissioner Green inquired about the parcels boundaries along Grassy Point, which appear to have boundaries that extend into open water. Filby Williams commented that there have been ongoing conversations with the Minnesota Department of Natural Resources to determine opportunities for updating the parcels to reflect the current open water and riparian boundaries. Some of the parcels will not be acquired as determined in collaboration with Planning and the County. Those that will be acquired by the City will have the boundaries re-drawn.

Filby Williams commented that the acquisition process has been a very significant time investment. There is an opportunity to apply for additional funding to acquire lands for protection. The City is looking to move strategically to acquire lands that are at a greater risk than the available tax forfeit parcels.

B.) NRMPP Update – Miller Creek Restoration and Tischer Creek culvert project

The first phase of the South St. Louis Soil and Water Conservation District's (SWCD) work to restore the historic stream meandering of Miller Creek has been completed. Construction will continue in 2023 with the subsequent phases. The work will address the significant temperature impairments in the creek that threaten native brook trout habitat.

Additionally, the SWCD has replaced the culvert serving Tischer Creek at Old Hartley Road in Hartley Park. The old culverts were constricting the creek and impeding trout movement. Chair Lindgren commented that the new, larger culvert complements previous work completed in Hartley to restore the original creek, where it had been historically ditched.



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C.) Parks Levy Discussion (Nancy Schuldt)

Vice Chair Schuldt prompted discussion of a draft point of view letter that could be used to share the Commission's perspective with Duluth voters.

Commissioner Sprague made a motion to provide Vice Chair Schuldt and Chair Lindgren with the authority to compose a letter for submission to the Duluth News Tribune and other venues as representatives of the Commission; seconded by Commissioner Schrage. Unanimously approved.

VII. New Business

No new business.

VIII. Staff Reports

A.) Natural Resources Coordinator and Forestry Reports (Kate Kubiak)

Kubiak has had multiple site visits including the Build Back Better tour, the Natural Areas Conference, an a meeting with the DNR Commissioners. Kubiak collaborated with Mindy Granley and Clark Christenson to host a City Arbor Day celebration. There will be an annual NRMPP meeting to bring city natural resources partners together to discuss ongoing and upcoming projects. Kubiak will provide a report on the meeting at the November meeting.

Chair Lindgren asked for an update on the Yellow Lady's-slipper transplanting event at Brighton Beach. Brooks responded that the event went well with more than 12 volunteers in attendance representing the EPA lab, Minnesota Master Naturalists, Izaak Walton League, Gitche Gumee Garden Club, and the DNR. The plants required relocation because they were in the path of the new road's future alignment.

A.) Director's Report (Jim Filby Williams)

Filby Williams had nothing additional to report.

IX. Public Comment

No public comments.

X. Announcements

Brooks announced three upcoming events. On Thursday, October 6, the Lake Superior National Estuarine Research Reserve is hosting a public engagement event at Chambers Grove Park to share information about the ongoing and upcoming St. Louis River restoration projects. The event will feature representatives from the Minnesota Land Trust, DNR, and other groups. On Monday, October 10, the Essential Spaces: Duluth Parks, Recreation, Open Space & Trails Plan will go before the City Council. On Monday, October 17, a ribbon cutting ceremony will be held at Hartley Nature center to celebrate the completed building expansion, and the stormwater, wayfinding, and accessibility improvements at Hartley Park.

Commissioner Sprague announced that there will be an audit beginning in 2023 of the City ordinances and codes that influence the development of green infrastructure. The audit will develop a list of



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recommendations for the City and a report will be provided as well. The City of Superior recently completed the process. The audit for Duluth may include a comparison to codes and ordinances of neighboring townships to assess implications for development.

Commissioner Schrage asked that the City of Duluth stormwater staff be invited to attend a future meeting to provide an update on the work they are doing to protect natural resources in the city.

XI. Adjournment

Commissioner Sprague made a motion to adjourn; second by Commissioner Dando. Unanimously approved.

Meeting adjourned at 7:34 p.m.

Next Meeting - Wednesday, November 2 at 6:00 p.m. at Duluth City Hall, Conference Room 155.