



PARKS AND RECREATION COMMISSION
Meeting of May 14, 2014
Marshall School Auditorium – 1215 Rice Lake Rd.



The meeting was called to order at 5 PM in the Marshall School Auditorium.

Members Present: Commissioner Hall, Commissioner Albright, Commissioner Viken, Commissioner Braun, Commissioner Wells, Commissioner Beasey-Latto, Kathy Bergen
Members Absent: Commissioner Schraepfer, Commissioner Holak
Also Present: Councilor Larson, Commissioner Jewell, Jim Filby Williams

The minutes for the meeting of April 30 were approved on motion of Viken, supported by Beasey-Lattoo, unanimous.

Commissioner Hall opened the meeting with an overview of the agenda for the evening, focusing on the Hartley Master Plan. He briefly highlighted the history of the public process for advancing the master plan for Hartley and then introduced Kathy Bergen and Jim Filby Williams.

PRESENTATIONS: Kathy Bergen began the City staff presentation on Hartley by restating the goals for the meeting and the history of the planning process. The goal of the meeting is not to take action on the master plan, but rather to update developments to the master plan and to hear feedback on updates. Kathy Bergen then turned it over to Jim Filby Williams.

Jim Filby Williams discussed the previous planning that resulted in many concerns and also highlighted the role of Hartley Nature Center (HNC) in making progress to a more agreeable master plan. Discussion began on the six elements of the master plan outlined below.

PINE PLANTATION

- Jim Filby Williams highlighted the inherent tension between needs/desire for pristine conditions and the needs/desire to develop and manage the pine plantation area.
- The consulting forester, Jan Bernu, highlighted the constant changing and evolving nature of the forest. She stated the desire to manage the forest for maximum ecological health and pointed out that currently the tree stand is very dense, which could have negative health impacts in the future. Jan suggested that some degree of intervention and management can help preserve and enhance the health of the Pine Plantation and referenced the Cloquet Valley Forest as an example of successful management.
- Jim Filby Williams reinforced that if the goal is to maintain aesthetics of the pine plantation then the goals will be different for a goal of maximum ecological health.

PARKING OPTIONS

Discussion related to parking focused at access points other than the main lot by Hartley Nature Center. New parking spaces will not be added. Parking will be better managed on streets where people are already accessing the park.

- At Hartley Road and Woodhaven the plan would slightly increase road width and have eight spots with a turnaround area
- At North Road there is recommendation to create a turnaround area
- At Fairmount Road Ms. Bergen pointed out that there is a lot of erosion and water issues and there is need to do something to manage water.

DULUTH TRAVERSE

Jim Filby Williams shared the vision and purpose of the Duluth Traverse. The criteria used to evaluate potential trails is

- Compatibility with the broader park
- Not dramatically increase trail density
- Limiting user conflict

Options previously discussed for the Duluth Traverse included:

- Old Hartley Road: Has positives of beginner and intro ability, negatives of user conflict – especially because the trail would be improved to create a smoother softer route which allows bikers to travel faster
- East of Old Hartley Route: This route was most in keeping with Duluth Traverse Trail, however it adds to already high density and would likely increase conflict between user groups
- Old Hartley Road and a new western route: This would involve beginning bikers stay on Old Hartley Road while creating a moderate difficulty trail which would attract the majority of bikers. Jim Filby Williams stated that this option was seen as the preferred route based on its balance of limited new trails and limited cross-user interaction. COGGS is in support of this route.

SURFACE OF OLD HARTLEY ROAD

Kathy Bergen stated that the Parks division received the highest number of comments regarding proposals to change the surface of Old Hartley Road. Kathy stated that a large number of the comments demonstrated the desire to keep paved surfaces out of the park...however, it is also the mission of the Parks Division to create greater accessibility.

- The majority of Old Hartley Road is open to several options including:
 - Paved (asphalt)
 - Crushed limestone
 - Permeable pavers
- Kathy Bergen stated that trail pavers would be the most expensive option with crushed limestone and paving being less costly. Of the two, crushed stone is slightly less expensive than paving. No decision has been made regarding which surface will be used.

HARTLEY POND

Jim Filby Williams opened by reinforcing that if maximum ecological health is the value we are basing decisions on, then it would likely result in removal of the dam and the loss of the pond. There is limited aquatic life just below the dam due to the warming effect of the dam on water. However, there is strong appreciation for the pond.

- There is a proposal for a trail around the pond but the trail needs to be a “win-win” that doesn’t cause environmental degradation. The amended trail proposal pushes the trail further from the pond and adds spur trails down to the water’s edge.

CROSS COUNTRY SKIING

- The overall goals for cross-country ski trails are reducing difficult and/or dangerous areas with sharp turns/trail crossings while adding directional loops.
- The goal is to not add many additional trails or overdevelop the park but rather adjust existing trails to improve usability.
- There is the possibility of adding a small beginner loop on land that is currently owned by the School District. There is a proposal for the City to acquire the land.

COMMISSIONER COMMENTS

Commissioner Hall:

- Expressed a desire to see the park maintain its focus on nature.
- Asked to see any potential plan for the dam that the DNR or other group(s) prepare.

Commissioner Albright:

- Pointed out that Hartley Nature Center is the primary tenant within the park and that must be taken into consideration when weighing different stakeholder ideas

Commissioner Viken:

- Asked how a petition that was circulated by neighbors and others impacted decisions made by consultants and City staff.
 - Jim Filby Williams stated that the petition was recognized but was not given added weight over other comments.
 - Commissioner Viken noted that Commissioners did not receive the petition within the public comments; requested that Commissioners receive a copy of the petition.
- Jim Filby Williams stated that the responsibility for outcomes is on the City for information shared and given to the consultants.
- Noted that the both editions of public comments showed strong support for multiuse trails and strong opposition to a paved trail. Commissioner Viken asked why the resulting revisions didn't include a larger number of multiuse trails, especially east of Old Hartley Road.
 - Jim Filby Williams reemphasized that the easterly route raised concerns of trail density and intersections. He noted that the Duluth Traverse within Hartley Nature Center is a roughly 1 mile section of their 100 mile trail.
- Asked if narrowing of ski trails to support a more limited multiuse trail has been considered by City staff or consultants
 - Jim Filby Williams: The City has not considered narrowing any ski trails and it would be unlikely without a groundswell of support for such a measure
- Asked if Hartley Nature Center has done any programming to expose kids to mountain biking
- Spoke in support of an eastern multiuse/mountain bike trail that would create a loop within the park
- What is the current status of the School District property?
 - Jim Filby Williams shared that the City has been meeting with the District and MN Land Trust. The Land Trust stated that it would have limited potential for public funding because the tract has limited ecological significance.
 - Portions of the trail are likely to be developed for housing. However the focus of public ownership would be to maintain a trail through the tract and to maintain ownership of the southeastern area.

Commissioner Braun:

- Asked about parking proximity in relation to the proposed .5 mile permeable paver trail
 - Jim Filby Williams replied that the trail is close to existing accessible trails near the Hartley Nature Center and to handicap parking within the main parking.
- Asked about the study of the Hartley Pond.
 - Jim Filby Williams stated that the DNR is interested in advocating for a feasibility study, which would impact the potential for a trail around the pond.
- Asked the forester if the pine plantation were left unattended, would it create risk to surrounding areas due to heightened fire risk, disease, etc.
 - Jan Bernu stated that the high density could lead to increased risk to disease among the trees. However, there would be limited risk to other plots of trees because they are primarily other species.

Commissioner Wells:

- Spoke in support of the ecological framework for managing the pine plantation and thinning trees some.
- Asked if all parking would be parallel parking and if there are other arrangements would result in more parking.
 - Jim Filby Williams stated that in order to do diagonal parking the City would need to take additional City land that is currently used as yards, and that the City would like to avoid that.

- Stated his support for crushed rock on Old Hartley Road as opposed to a paved surface.
 - Jim Filby Williams stated that the permeable pavers are actually likely to be the most durable surface option. He also stated that the City has an easier time getting capital to build rather than money to maintain.
- Asked if there was potential for beautification of the dam.
 - Jim Filby Williams said that there is an interest in that.
- Shared a desire to see any DNR study regarding the pond be reviewed by the Parks and Recreation Commission.

Commissioner Beasy-Latto:

- Stated that it is important to ensure accessibility so that the treasured park does not become a “hidden gem”.

Councilor Larson:

- Stated her support for the development that has taken place since the initial plan.

Commissioner Jewell:

- Stated his support for the plan that has developed.

PUBLIC COMMENT

Tom O’Rourke (Hartley Nature Center)

- Thanked those responsible for the process for the opportunity to weigh in several times already and stated that Hartley Nature Center believes the plan is currently in a better place.
- HNC supports accessibility measures outlined presently that balances open opportunities while maintaining pristine status.
- Feels that an agreeable consensus has been reached between user groups with regards to the Duluth Traverse and development east of Old Hartley Road.
- Asked that the Commission represent all interests and not make decisions for one particular stakeholder group.
- The park has offered bike camps for kids and will be offering a preschool starting in the fall.

Paul Anderson

- Neighbors view themselves as stewards of the park. In his opinion neighbors have consensus regarding desire to minimize development...concerned about development of bike trail east of Old Hartley Road.

Jim Shoberg (COGGS)

- COGGS supports current plan and is not asking for a route east of Old Hartley Road.

Tom Jordan

- Trails have widened in response to larger groomers more than the need to widen trails because of users.
- Supports long-term ecological view when making management decisions.
- Sees four special habitat areas: (1) shoreline habitat, (2) wet meadow on the south side of the Rock Knob, (3) east side of hunters field old growth forest, (4) wetlands upstream of the pond
- Supports active restoration and remediation of trails that are abandoned.

Marcia Troy

- Lives directly next to Hartley Park. Stated that she was very impressed with the progress and collaboration of the plan, which she is especially grateful of, given her strong concerns previously.
- Has concerns regarding multiuse trails and their safety and impact on enjoying the park in quietness.

Raymond Erickson

- Encouraged by recent developments with the master plan. It had been a very discouraging and frustrating process because of the timing of plans being released and perceived deference to user groups over individuals.

Elizabeth Hoven

- Supports putting packed stone down on Old Hartley Road

Matt Hoven

- Encouraged by the evolution of the master plan.
- Opposed to paved trail.
- Feels there's not currently an issue with cars near trail heads.
- Wants to ensure developments can be sustained financially.

John Paulson (HNC board)

- Requested that Hartley Nature Center be consulted when making decisions regarding signage.

Martha Ferling

- Wants to know what the specifications for the Old Hartley Trail would be and requests that information be available to public before a Commission vote.

Shane Bubacz

- Concerned about additional traffic brought into the residential neighborhood, especially given the lack of sidewalks.
- Suggested if the parking lots are developed, the neighborhoods become a residential permit parking area.

ADJOURNMENT:

The meeting adjourned at 7:50 PM on motion of Commissioner Wells, supported by Beasey-Latto; unanimous.