



PARKS and RECREATION COMMISSION

Meeting Minutes of May 13, 2015

Central Hillside Center
12 E 4th St



1. Call to Order

Commissioner Hall called the meeting to order at 5:00 pm.

2. Roll Call

PRESENT: Commissioners Albright, Breeuwer, Contardo, Crosby, Dodge, Hall, Schmidt, Schraepfer and Torch

NOT PRESENT: Commissioners Holak and Welles

3. Welcome to New Members:

President Hall welcomed new Parks and Recreation Commissioners Patrick Contardo (at-large) and Tjaard Breeuwer (1st District).

4. Approval of Minutes

Commissioner Crosby motioned for approval of the March 11, 2015, meeting minutes; second by Commissioner Contardo. Motion carried.

Commissioner Albright motioned for approval of the April 15, 2015, meeting minutes; second by Commissioner Schmidt. Motion carried.

5. Presentations

A. 2015 Spring Parks Fund Grants – Kathy Bergen (action requested)

The Parks Fund has allocated \$100,000 a year, \$50,000 for Spring Grant rounds and \$50,000 for Fall Grant rounds. Due to higher applicant requests and to disseminate benefits as diversely and fairly as possible, the selection process needed to be more discerning in project funding. Organizations requesting more than one grant had preference given to the stronger application. The Committee brought forward a unanimous recommendation to support 11 requests, totaling \$50,000. (See attached.) Ms. Bergen discussed each of the committee recommendations.

Motion to support committee recommendations made by Commissioner Schmidt; second by Commissioner Schraepfer. Motion carried 9-0.

Since the Parks Levy was approved, starting in 2012, 78 grants totaling \$350,000 have been awarded.

B. Cross Country Ski Master Plan – Gary Larson (action requested)

Mr. Larson gave an overview of the process that went in to developing the plan, including numerous opportunities for public input. Finalization of the plan was delayed to develop the Grand Avenue Nordic Center (GANC) Mini-Master Plan and make modifications to the Chester Park Mini-Master Plan.

Not a lot of new trails will be added. Focus is to improve what exists and maximize existing trails. Two major recommendations were more frequent grooming and wider trails for shared



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skate and classic skiing.

A compromise was reached at Chester Park to create a shared use skier/walker trail. Commissioner Torch commented about the positive feedback he has heard about the shared use trail.

Councilor Sipress noted the need to reflect the same language from the Chester Park Mini-Master Plan about the recommendation for lighting at Chester Park. Commissioner Hall noted a need to update language from the Hartley Mini-Master Plan as well.

Commissioner Dodge asked about adding a Kenwood parking option at Chester. The land in question is City owned and currently used to stockpile materials. Ms. Bergen clarified that this Plan is only a proposed concept. More feasibility studies need to be done to determine if other departments can shift current use to other areas.

Hartley – work on cross country ski trails to begin this summer. The plan is to reorient trail directions to allow for easy and intermediate loops. Plans for a beginner, practice area and small loop on adjacent School District owned property will happen only after the City purchases the property. Some of this cross country ski trail work will be paid for out of the Legacy Grant.

Lester – the chalet has been adopted by the Duluth Cross Country Ski Club (DXC) and Duluth Mountain Bike Team for use. Lester is currently the only system with lights. Since snow is often better on the upper loops, it is proposed to add lights to these upper sections.

Magney – working with the equestrian group. A consultant is already working on the project.

Requests received to add some single track Nordic skiing to Duluth trails. It is very popular in other areas.

The City has already purchased a new state-of-the-art groomer. DXC is also purchasing grooming equipment.

Commissioner Dodge asked about improving grooming reports. City groomers have been posting on Skinny Ski this year. There is room to improve. Perhaps utilize mobile apps.

The Spirit Mountain Master Plan designates an area at the top of the hill for a Nordic Center with lighting and snowmaking capacity. This plan would be updated to move the Nordic Center to the Grand Avenue Chalet area.

MOTION: To approve the Cross Country Ski Trail Master Plan as presented. Moved by Commissioner Contardo; second by Commissioner Dodge, motioned carried 9-0.

- C. Grand Avenue Nordic Center Mini-Master Plan and Spirit Mountain Master Plan Update – Gary Larson and Jim Filby Williams (action requested)



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An outline of the key elements of the Mini-Master Plan to construct a new Nordic Center near the Grand Avenue Chalet at Spirit Mountain was presented. Many elements came together to make this concept feasible: an upgrade on the water system, construction of the Grand Avenue Chalet, and support from the City. There are currently no cross country ski trails located in this portion of the City.

Commissioner Schmidt asked if cross country skiers have to buy a pass from Spirit Mountain to use the trails. Yes, Spirit Mountain will maintain trails and collect revenue from sale of the passes.

Commissioner Dodge expressed concern about the cost being prohibitive. Mr. Larson stated they are working to address this concern. Perhaps different rates based on zip codes. Concern was raised at a public meeting also, but snowmaking is expensive and revenue is needed to offset this expense.

Mr. Filby Williams noted the City did a review of other snowmaking areas and all charge fees. Different pricing options will be researched.

President Hall asked who decides pricing. DXC, Spirit Mountain and the City will work together to develop a plan that works for all to make it a feasible project. The City will be committing funding for capital projects; DXC is committed to raising money to close funding gaps and organizing events to help pay for costs; Spirit Mountain will cover operations and maintenance. A detailed plan will be worked out as part of the development process. The City has assured Spirit Mountain that the City and DXC will concentrate activities to make this a breakeven enterprise.

Private land owners have committed to providing easements for trails.

Commissioner Albright inquired how the 3.3 km length was determined. 2.5 - 3 km is a standard minimum for snowmaking loops and 3.3 km is the average of other snowmaking loops in the state. Future event planning was also a factor. Events are usually 5 km - 3.3 km would allow 3 loops for a 10 km race.

Mr. Larson mentioned the Snowflake Nordic Center is planning to scale down its operations. Commissioner Dodge asked why we wouldn't focus on supporting this location given the better snow at that location. There is better infrastructure at Spirit Mountain and since it is located in the St. Louis River Corridor, it is eligible for ½ and ½ Tourism Tax to support the capital investments.

DXC committed to raise \$250,000 for snowmaking and grooming. The City will match with additional grant writing for \$250,000. The City will submit only one grant for State Park and Trail Legacy Amendment funding this year and it will be this project. The City will provide \$1,000,000 of ½ and ½ Tourism Tax funding for this project. President Hall questioned whether work would begin before grant dollars are secured. Some preliminary work may be done this year, but Legacy grant funding will be needed in order to proceed.



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There was an inquiry about the status of DXC fundraising. Mr. Filby Williams is optimistic, as DXC has already secured \$80,000.

Commissioner Schmidt pointed out Spirit Mountain is having a difficult time breaking even. Is this going to make their problems bigger? Mr. Filby Williams replied the City has been gathering statistics from other facilities. Administration needs to be assured this will be a break even or better proposition or it's not going to happen. Additionally, the Spirit Mountain Director won't sign on unless it's a net benefit to Spirit Mountain. The operating agreement will come back for review to the Commission.

Commissioner Albright inquired about the Phase II timeline and cost. It will happen after a successful launch of Phase I. Both phases are being planned now with more specific construction costs estimated. DXC is keen to keep raising money for Phase II.

Will \$1,000,000 be the extent of City investment? This is subject to City Council approval. Phase I is the priority. Phase II is more aspirational and up to our partners to help realize. The City won't likely be a major funder of Phase II.

Question from the public:

Will the new water system have the capacity to meet both ski area needs for snow? Yes, planned capacity will surpass need of both systems. The Nordic trails will only need snow making over 4 days.

Will better signage be added on Grand Avenue? There are no plans at the moment.

Motion made to approve the presented Grand Avenue Nordic Center Mini-Master Plan and update the Spirit Mountain Master Plan as requested. Moved by Commissioner Albright, second by Commissioner Torch, motion carried 9-0.

D. New Cell Tower Proposal for Wheeler Field Athletic Complex – Jim Filby Williams (informational)

A cellular service company is in negotiation with the City to put a tower on an existing structure at the complex. A shed may be added to house equipment. The agreement will go to Council for approval contingent on Planning Commission approval. Parks and Recreation Commission has not traditionally been involved in installation of utilities in parks. Administration does not want to change that but wants to solicit feedback.

The company needed to look for other areas first before considering City park land. They will need to restore and improve any disturbances to park property. Mr. Filby Williams assured the Commission the City will not allow disturbance to recreational amenities.

President Hall stated he does not want to be put in the same position as Chester Park by having the Planning Commission ask why the Parks and Recreation Commission was not solicited for feedback.



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Councilor Sipress stated the City Council changed the Unified Development Chapter (UDC) to establish a new process for cell towers, making park land a last resort after other options are eliminated. As the Council liaison to the Parks Commission, he will read the agreement very closely. He thinks this Commission should receive a copy of the agreement prior to Council voting on it (informational only).

President Hall stated he thinks the Commission should have the ability to review this decision and offer support or not.

E. Renaming of Chester Park Chalet for Thom Storm (action requested)

Ms. Bergen gave an overview of the process to name park facilities/buildings and introduced the proposal to rename the Chester Park Chalet after Thom Storm.

Mr. Storm worked at Chester Park for 40 years, mainly as a City employee, and developed a lot of programs for youth. He worked the last 8 years for the Chester Bowl Improvement Club.

The ski chalet would be renamed the "Thom Storm Chalet" with an appropriate sign on the building. There are plans to have a ceremony at a concert this summer.

Motion made to rename the chalet at Chester Park the "Thom Storm Chalet". Moved by Commissioner Contardo; second by Commissioner Schmidt, motion carried 9 – 0.

F. Western Sports Corridor Mini-Master Plan Update – Kathy Bergen (informational)

Ms. Bergen gave an update on the process to develop the Western Sports Corridor Mini-Master Plan, including some feedback from the open house.

There was a lot of interest in an indoor facility for sports. A couple versions of the plan include the potential for this option. It's an expensive venture. A seasonal structure would cost between \$2-4 million. A year-round facility is closer to \$10 million. Most Duluthians want to be outside during the summer, so it's probably not feasible to build a year round facility. Ms. Bergen anticipates a final plan by August.

Major requests for the Wade Stadium area are to improve parking and circulation and add a section of the Cross City Trail. There was a lot of neighborhood support. A public meeting is scheduled at the end of May and another Open House in early June.

6. Commission Committees

A. Parks and Facilities – meeting date: TBA

Chair – Michael Schraepfer – Jon Welles, Ed Hall, John Schmidt, [Dale Sellner]

The Committee met today (May 13, 2015) prior to the Commission meeting to discuss a piece of undeveloped, tax-forfeited land on Park Point known as Pontliana Woods. Two parcels are tax-forfeited and scheduled for sale in June. Commissioner Gardner convinced the St. Louis



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County Board to remove parcel 9 from the sale at this time, but was not successful on the other parcel. Park Point Community Club is resigned to the compromise of selling one parcel for development and retaining parcel 9 for conservation.

Councilor Sipress stated that if the Commission takes the stronger position of asking for both parcels to be put in conservation, we can add the caveat that at least Parcel 9 needs to be preserved.

John Ramos, a reporter from the Reader, stated he does not believe the County Board wants to preserve the land. If there isn't a plan by October to secure the land, they will auction it.

Councilor Gardner and the City believe there is potential to reach an agreeable compromise.

Motion: After review, the Parks and Facilities Committee recommends that the Parks Commission recommend the City Administration do whatever is necessary, including a conditional use request, if appropriate, to St. Louis County, to maintain and improve parcel 9, (Pontliana Woods Wetlands) for permanent public use. No second needed as motion came from committee. Motion carried 9 – 0.

- B. Administrative (E-Board) – meeting date: TBA
Chair – Ed Hall – Jon Welles, Erik Torch, [Kathy Bergen]

No update.

- C. Trails and Bikeways – meeting date: TBA
Chair – Tom Albright - Andy Holak, Tiersa Dodge, [Judy Gibbs]

No update.

- D. Recreation Programming (youth and adult) – meeting date: TBA
Chair - Jon Welles – Andy Holak, Erik Torch, Amanda Crosby, [Pamela Page]

No update.

7. Commissioner & Liaison Reports

Councilor Sipress reported the Lakewalk study has begun and should be completed by August.

Commissioner Torch reported that work on the Hartley Legacy Grant Committee has commenced.

Commissioner Schmidt reported the first Park Point Tier 2 meeting was held recently. They hope to have a recommendation by the end of the year. He reflected the need to stay vigilant on making a place for folks living in the St Louis River Corridor neighborhoods to ski for free (referencing the early discuss about charging for the GANC use). Commissioner Torch suggested



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grooming the rebuilt Western Waterfront Trail might be a good free alternative. Commissioners expressed broad interest in making sure we keep this an issue moving forward.

Commissioner Dodge reported the group meeting about the Lincoln Park Small Area Plan has discussed ideas for future uses of the park.

8. New Business

- A. Orientation scheduled for Friday, May 29 from 11:30 am to 1 pm in the Parks office.
- B. Special Parks Commission meeting for Thursday, June 4 at City Hall, Room 303, to discuss additional Fairmount Park/Zoo planning that has occurred since the presentation to the City Council on April 27.
- C. Name submission process for the Lowell to Lakewalk Trail.
 - Lowell to Lakewalk name no longer applies as it will not start at Lowell Elementary School due to land access issues. Discussion was held on how to name the entire trail and possibly segments of the trail. Ms. Bergen announced the City's interest in a submission process for potential names for this trail. President Hall requested that Commissioner Albright take this on at the Trails and Bikeways Committee.

9. Old Business

- A. St Louis River Corridor Updates – 2015 Projects
 - There are plans to have webpages for each project to provide a public access point for information and input.
 - Received grant for the Western Waterfront Trail.
 - Working to set process in motion for mini-master plans for neighborhood parks.

10. Division Manager's Report

Ms. Bergen is retiring at the end of August. Her job is posted. The City is doing a wide search, posting at state and national locations. The hope is to have someone on board by August 1st to allow for a transition phase because it is an extremely busy time.

11. Adjournment:

Meeting adjourned at 7:54 pm.

12. Next meeting

A special meeting to be held 5 pm, Thursday, June 4, at City Hall, Room 303. Sole topic will be Fairmount Park/Zoo planning. The meeting is informational only with opportunity for public input.

The next regular monthly meeting is 5 pm, Wednesday, June 10, at Central Hillside Center.

MOTION(S)

1. To support committee recommendations for 2015 Spring Parks Fund Grants. Moved by Commissioner Schmidt; second by Commissioner Schraepfer, motion carried 9-0.
2. To approve the Cross Country Ski Master Plan as presented. Moved by Commissioner Contardo, second by Commissioner Dodge, motion carried 9-0.

3. To approve the Grand Avenue Nordic Center Mini-Master Plan as presented and to update the Spirit Mountain Master Plan as requested. Moved by Commissioner Albright, second by Commissioner Torch, motion carried 9-0.
4. To rename the chalet at Chester Park the "Thom Storm Chalet". Moved by Commissioner Contardo; second by Commissioner Schmidt, motion carried 9-0.
5. After review, the Parks and Facilities Committee recommends that the Parks Commission recommend the City Administration do whatever is necessary, including a conditional use request, if appropriate, to St. Louis County, to maintain and improve Parcel 9 (Pontiliana Woods Wetlands) for permanent public use. No second needed as motion came from Committee. Motion carried 9 – 0.

2015 SPRING NEIGHBORHOOD GRANT AWARDS

Company Name	Project Name	Requested	Awarded	Approved	Resolution	Council Date
Chester Bowl Improvement Club (CBIC)	Chester Bowl Safety Improvements	\$5,000	\$5,000	X	15-0301R	May 26, 2015
COGGS (Cyclists of Gitchee Gummee Shores, Inc.)	Summer Maintenance Program	\$5,000	\$5,000	X	15-0301R	May 26, 2015
Duluth Cross-Country Ski Club (DXC)	Lester/Amity Chalet Water Drainage Abatement	\$5,000	\$5,000	X	15-0301R	May 26, 2015
East Hillside Patch	Chester Creek: Taking Care with Shovel and Song	\$0	\$0	WITHDREW		
Friends of Keen Creek Park	Seating for Keene Creek Park	\$5,000	\$5,000	X	15-0301R	May 26, 2015
Glen Avon Hockey Association	Ice Rink Repairs	\$5,000	\$5,000	X	15-0301R	May 26, 2015
GND Development Alliance	GND Center Revitalization and Sod	\$5,000	\$5,000	X	15-0301R	May 26, 2015
Hartley Nature Center	Environmental Education Intern Support	\$5,000	\$5,000	X	15-0301R	May 26, 2015
Lake Superior Zoological Society	John Deere Riding Lawn Mower Purchase	\$5,000	\$5,000	X	15-0301R	May 26, 2015
University of Minnesota Foundation	Park Point Beach Safety Kit Boxes	\$3,000	\$3,000	X	15-0301R	May 26, 2015
Woodland Amateur Hockey Association (WAHA)	Lower Rink Maintenance Free Project	\$5,000	\$5,000	X	15-0301R	May 26, 2015
		\$48,000	\$48,000			