

Urban Forest Commission

Meeting Minutes August 15, 2018

Attendance:

Commissioners: Christine Penney, Judy Gibbs, Brandon Van Tassel, Susan Stanich, Mike Pennington, Jim Lemmerman

City Staff: Diane Desotelle, City Provisional Natural Resources Coordinator; Erik Birkeland, Ex-Officio; Jim Filby Williams, Director of Public Administration; City Councilor Em Westerlund (not present)

Call to Order:

The meeting started at 6:02 pm.

Minute Approval:

A motion was made to approve the minutes from the July 18th, 2018, Meeting. M/S/C.

Public Comment Period: No comments

Forester's Report (Erik Birkeland – Property & Facilities Manager)

The City has completed its interviews for the Forester position and will be extending an offer, we expect to have an answer in the next two weeks.

Old Business:

UFC View shed Policy Subcommittee – Tabled

UFC Term Limits – Tabled

New Business:

Administrative Updates on the UFC Commission Transition (Jim Filby Williams – Director of Public Administration)

Jim Filby Williams, Director of Public Administration, shared the latest version of a document outlining the proposed conversion of the Urban Forest Commission to a Natural Resources Commission. He explained the overall intent and provided an overview of the proposed purpose and responsibilities that will be presented to the Mayor at an upcoming administrative meeting.

Proposed Purpose: The primary purpose of the Duluth Natural Resources Commission is to protect and enhance the ecological health of Duluth's public lands and, thereby, the regional ecosystems of which they are an integral part, by providing science-based guidance to the mayor and city council on their composition, preservation, restoration, and sustainable management.

Jim Filby Williams agreed to incorporate language into the purpose statement that explicitly recognizes the importance of cultural and/or spiritual values, identity and/or knowledge for administrations consideration as a result of suggestions from Brandon Van Tassel and Susan Stanich, respectfully.

Proposed Responsibilities:

- Advise on studies conducted on the presence, health, and management of natural resources on public green space.
- Develop recommendations on how to protect, restore, and manage natural resources on public green space.
- Solicit public input on the protection, restoration, and management of natural resources on public green space.
- Advise on issues, policies, ordinances, and programs pertaining to the protection, restoration and management of trees on public green space and, where indicated by ordinance, on private property.
- Advise on the composition of the City's portfolio of green space and plans to purchase or sell such properties.
- Oversee the Duluth Natural Area Program designed to designate, protect, and manage lands of special environmental value.
- Upon request, advise the City Council, mayor and other boards and commissions about natural resources related issues, projects, and plans.
- Improve stewardship of natural resources on private property by modeling protection, restoration and management actions on public spaces, disseminating best practices and providing advisory support on future comprehensive land use plans.

Mike Pennington commented that there should be a mechanism in place to scrutinize projects or proposals that are naturally sensitive. Jim Filby Williams pointed out that major environmental land use decisions by the City are *statutorily shaped* by federal, state, and local guidelines. Jim shared that it was his hope that this group would focus more on implementing recommendations identified by plans and studies conducted by other entities. He also pointed out that we are lucky to have such great partners but have lacked cohesiveness in the past. Judy Gibbs commented that she was grateful for the City's increased focus on natural resources. Mike agreed with Judy and stated that there is plenty of work to do.

Proposed Membership:

The Duluth Natural Resources Commission shall consist of nine voting members appointed by the Mayor, subject to confirmation by the City Council, who shall be eligible voters residing within the city limits of Duluth.

All nine members shall have meaningful experience and expertise in the management of natural resources.

Four members must have technical expertise in specific fields:

- At least one member shall have technical expertise in forestry
- At least one member shall have technical expertise in plant resources management
- At least one member shall have technical expertise in water resources management
- At least one member shall have technical expertise in some other field of natural resources management (e.g., wildlife, invasive species, ornithology, geology)

The remaining five members shall be persons with meaningful expertise and experience related to natural resources protection and management. Efforts shall be made to select members who, by virtue of their place of residence, interest, and/or work, collectively represent all geographic areas of the City.

Proposed Staffing:

The Duluth Natural Resources Commission shall be staffed by the Department of Public Administration including the Director of Public Administration, the Park Maintenance Manager, the Park Manager, the Natural Resources Coordinator and the City Forester. These staff will be responsible to facilitate and support the work of the commission and liaise as necessary with other city departments including Planning, Public Works, and Business Development.

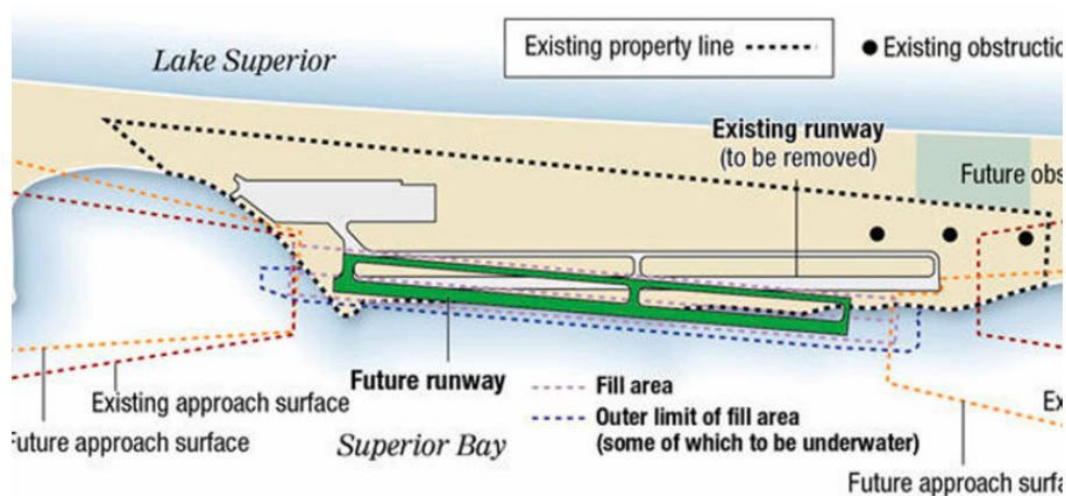
Christine stressed the importance that the new Natural Resources Coordinator and Forester positions both need to strive to take the lead on increasing internal departmental communication. Jim Filby Williams agreed that attempts will be made to hold regular and expected communications and also pointed out that increasing the knowledge base will lessen the egregiousness of natural resources errors.

Jim shared with the group a few of the potential strategic initiatives identified for the group and also communicated on the next steps. Ideally, once fully supported and approved by administration, work can begin to change the ordinances governing this commission and implementation is expected by January 2019.

Sky Harbor Airport Construction Update – Natalie White (SEH Engineering)

Natalie White, Biologist with SEH Engineering, spoke regarding the phased construction of the Sky Harbor Airport Runway Relocation project on Park Point. Due to the proximity of the protected old-growth forest of red and white pines, it was determined the existing runway would need to be shortened and rotated to accommodate flight pattern requirements. SEH Engineering began Phase I construction in 2017 with the instillation of a rip-rap shoreline and fill. The area was then seeded using a native seed mixture to assist with erosion control. Phase II is set to begin this September and continue through December 2018. This phase will involve the placement of additional fill to help settle the substrate, continued monitoring, and the creation of terrestrial and aquatic habitat features adjacent to the new runway. The final phase will occur in September 2019 when the permanent runway will be installed.

Additional information can be found here: <http://www.sehinc.com/portfolio/sky-harbor-airport-runway-relocation>



Adjournment:

There was a motion to adjourn the meeting at 7:23, M/S/C.