



# PARKS & RECREATION COMMISSION

Meeting Minutes of June 14, 2017

City Hall – Mayor’s Reception Room 4<sup>th</sup> Floor  
411 W 1<sup>st</sup> St



## I. Call Meeting to Order

President Schmidt called the meeting to order at 5:04 pm.

## II. Roll Call

Present: John Schmidt, Dudley Edmondson, Dennis Isernhagen, Britt Rohrbaugh, Kristin Bergerson, Em Westerlund (City Council Liaison)

Absent: Erik Torch, Amanda Crosby, Tjaard Breeuwer, Tiersa Wodash, Dean Vogtman, Michael Schraepfer, Frank Jewell (St. Louis County Board Liaison), Art Johnston (ISD 709 School Board Liaison)

## III. Welcome newest Commission member

President Schmidt welcomed the newest Parks Commissioner, Dennis Isernhagen, who will represent district two.

## IV. Approval of May 10 Meeting Minutes

President Schmidt explained that without a quorum they are unable to approve the May 10, 2017 minutes or the Zoo Fund Grant and will carry both over to the July 12, 2017 meeting. Continued by reading aloud the mission statement of the Parks and Recreation Division. Recited quote from Nancy S. Nelson's recent book titled *Duluth's Historic Parks*: "the parks of a modern city bear witness that its people are members of one great family, they are the concrete expression of civic consciousness in its highest visible form". Encouraged the group to purchase Nancy's book.

## V. Presentations

- A. Youth Outdoors-Duluth and True North AmeriCorps – Tracie Clanaugh, Community Services Branch Executive Director, Duluth Area Family YMCA and Melody David-McKnight, Youth-Outdoors Coordinator, Duluth Area Family YMCA (informational)

David-McKnight: Stated the mission of Youth-Outdoors Duluth is to ensure that all youth have access to a progression of nature based experiences through community-wide coordination of resources and expertise.

Clanaugh: Explained how the group emerged, noting that back in March of 2016 a group of committed partners were convened by the Minnesota Land Trust and the Northland Foundation, to discuss the adventure gap present in Duluth. Stated that although there are a lot of opportunities for people to participate in Duluth Parks and with natural resources, there are people in the community, including children and youth, who do not have these experiences, creating disparity and an obvious gap. Further explained that the group decided this gap needed to be addressed, therefore a large group of partners came together to make a difference. Indicated that roughly a year after, the Northland Foundation provided grant funds to hire Melody David-McKnight, which put legs to the



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group and got things moving. Indicated a theory of change process was used, which pushed a strong need for collaboration, noting how ineffective it would be to work in separate silos. Explained the group also realized the importance of responding to diversity within the community, recognizing the children and youth they wished to serve, and the need for outdoor opportunities that truly met their needs, even if those needs are different from other youth in the community. Described Melody's role to coordinate Youth-Outdoors Duluth.

David-McKnight: Explained one of her first initiatives when starting the position was interviewing local youth serving agencies to find out what the interests, motivations and barriers were to providing access to the outdoors to kids. Highlighted the three biggest needs identified:

- Need for skilled and experienced adults
- Need for a connection to resources
- Need for teaching support

David-McKnight: Described the thirteen lesson plans she designed and adopted, which are aimed at becoming a teaching resource. Highlighted program numbers from June 2016 to May 2017:

- Trained 70 AmeriCorps Members
- Trained 8 Out-of-School Time Specialists
- 422 kids outside, 13,990 hours of outdoor time

Clanough: Indicated from their meetings one major challenge they were facing was a lack of staffing. Explained how the group worked to address their staffing needs, including the call for staff that could deal with a diverse group of youth. Described the marriage that happened between True North AmeriCorps and Youth-Outdoors Duluth, which capitalized on a strong partnership and the desire to get youth outdoors. Noted the importance of the support AmeriCorps receives from the City of Duluth and the strength of this partnership. Described the relationship between AmeriCorps and Youth-Outdoors as one rooted in coordination of staffing and training.

David-McKnight: Explained that a small group of AmeriCorps members were trained at a three-day event at the Outdoor Leadership Institute where they learn a progression of skills in the following:

- Fire building and sustainment
- Knot tying and tarp set-up
- Shelter Construction
- Intro to compasses, orienteering, triangulation
- Stuffed animal habitat
- Adaptations and animal tracking
- Behavior and risk management
- Art of setup
- Developmental stages of youth

David-McKnight: Explained that after the small group went through the Institute's training, they came back and helped train other AmeriCorps members at a local retreat. Named the organizations they have received grant funding from:

- Duluth Parks and Recreation (2 grants)
- Northland Foundation (1)



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- Duluth Superior Community Foundation (1)
- Lloyd K. Johnson Foundation (1)

David-McKnight: Named the four initiatives they are moving forward with this year:

- Community Events
  - Spirit Mountain event with Duluth Cross Country Ski Club (lessons and animal tracking),
  - Biking event with Community Action Duluth (bike rodeo)
  - Instructors and tools available at each event
- Establishing a gear and curriculum library
  - Managed and maintained at UMD
  - To access the library, you have to be a member organization of Youth-Outdoors Duluth (\$150 membership fee)
- Coordinating an adventure series
  - Instructors scheduled for 4 hours over 3 sessions for youth serving agencies to participate
- Providing additional training and support
  - 19 outdoor providers in Duluth and 26 youth serving agencies
  - Continuity achieved
  - Have sponsored 73 hours of adult training

Schmidt: Explained he has spent his career working with at risk kids and is blow away by the amount of activities that Youth-Outdoors provides and the sophistication of the marriage between youth serving agencies and experts in the field. Applauded them on their work in closing the adventure gap and questioned if there was anything the Parks Commission can do to be supportive of their initiatives.

Clanough: Described the City of Duluth as being a big financial supporter and asks that they continue to support this project, recognizing that as park improvements continue it helps them provide even more opportunities. Mentioned that former Parks Manager, Lindsay Dean, sat on the Steering Committee. Extended an invitation to the new Parks Manager, encouraging engagement for the future of their program.

### VI. Commission Committees

- A. Parks and Facilities – meeting date: TBA  
Chair - Michael Schraepfer – John Schmidt, Dean Vogtman [Dale Sellner]
- B. Administrative (E-Board) – meeting date: Thursday, June 15 at 12:00pm in the Parks office  
Chair – John Schmidt – Erik Torch, Amanda Crosby [Kathy Bergen]
- C. Trails and Bikeways – meeting date: TBD  
Chair – Tjaard Breeuwer– Tiersa Wodash, Britt Rohrbaugh, Dudley Edmondson, Dean Vogtman, Art Johnston, Mike Casey, Eric Viken, Shawna Mullen [Andy Holak]
- D. Recreation Programming (youth and adult) – meeting date: TBA  
Chair – Erik Torch – Amanda Crosby, Dudley Edmondson, Kristin Bergerson, [Pamela Page]



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## VII. Commissioner & Liaison Reports

## VIII. New Business

- A. Western Waterfront Park and Trail Mini-Master Plan Update – Lisa Luokkala and Jim Filby Williams, City of Duluth (informational)

Ms. Luokkala, Project Coordinator, City of Duluth, provided an update on the Western Waterfront Park and Trail Mini-Master Plan, utilizing the planning document from the June 13, 2017 public meeting to describe where they were in the planning process.

Luokkala: Explained that over the past ten months the group has engaged in the planning process regarding the mostly City-owned 10 to 12-mile corridor along the St. Louis River, which includes the existing 3.3 miles of the Western Waterfront Trail, the historic rail bed, as well as the five existing or planned river access points. Noted the project goals:

- Increase connectivity from the adjacent neighborhoods to the St. Louis River and estuary
- Increase recreational and development opportunities within and along the river
- Facilitate stakeholder and community involvement in the process
- Enhance neighborhood quality of life
- Restore and protect natural habitat
- Determine whether to retain and potentially improve the current rail line

Luokkala: Described the process thus far, noting the group of 39 stakeholders that took part in five workshops, which included representation from natural resource managers, neighborhood community club presidents, recreation groups, angler groups, DNR representatives and representative from LS&M Railroad. Named the guiding principles that assured they were studying the right things during the planning process:

- Create a multi-use recreational trail along the shoreline from Irving Park to the Fond du Lac neighborhood
- Provide a unique and safe experience for trail users of all abilities
- Educate, honor and celebrate the rich history along St. Louis River

Luokkala: Listed the six values that were looked at when working on the plan and recommendations:

- Community connection
- Unique Duluth experience
- Equitable experience (accessibility and socioeconomic)
- Technically and economically feasible
- Environmentally sustainable
- Promoting economic development

Luokkala: Described the study area and their goal in identifying and clarifying the significance of the trail in relation to the larger St. Louis River Corridor initiative. Explained their recommendation to rename the trail to better reflect the river and the region, which would include a co-Ojibwe name.

Provided suggested names:

- St. Louis River Heritage Trail
- Great Lake River Trail

- Gitche Gami Ziibi
- Chi Gami Zibing

Luukkala: Provided their recommendation for a more in-depth study to determine the signage necessary, noting their desire for interpretive signage in the Corridor if funding is available. Described the five water access points and the first study conducted which looked at existing access points. Noted the large gap between Munger Landing and Boy Scout Landing, where the US Steel site is located. Highlighted the approval of the St. Louis River Estuary Water Trail Plan by the Parks Commission and City Council, which demonstrated a need for improvement at non-motorized access points along the estuary. Shared the recommendations for each water access point in the plan:

- Lower Spirit
  - New road to the access point off of Grand Avenue, across from Lower Spirit Chalet
  - Offer water access and provides an opportunity for a new trail head
  - Additional parking for up to ten cars and three trailers
  - Staging area for outfitters or youth serving agencies (green space)
  - Changing room enclosure
  - Two public sand beach area (one being ADA accessible)
- Munger Landing
  - Separate motorized and non-motorized launch
  - Increased parking
- Boy Scout Landing
  - Separate motorized and non-motorized launch
  - Kayak pier launch
  - Softening of shore line
  - Concrete pad for seasonal concessions or staging area
- Perch Lake
  - Improved parking
  - Picnic area
  - ADA access trail down to rivers edge
  - Potential involvement with DNR to create a sheltered water area
- Slag Point
  - Part of US Steel cleanup site
  - EPA and US Steel determine this a contained disposal facility
  - Area will be capped and bermed to be used for recreational use
  - Parking lot – up to 18 stalls
  - Road access to launch

Luukkala: Explained that during the planning process they considered existing studies regarding rail and trail or rail to trail options, as Duluth is not the first community to go through such a process. Described how they studied typology and what would be possible, noting the tradeoffs with each option, and more specifically the varying price tags and overall health of the river and shoreline with each option. Highlighted the first public meeting held in November 2016, which shared the different options with the community:

- Traditional rail to trail conversion
- Value engineered rail and trail



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- River optimized plan

Luukkala: Described the competing interests regarding the land adjacent to the river and the many questions and concerns they received from community members. Highlighted the studies and meetings that took place after the first public meeting:

- Voluntary online survey from community
- Random sample phone survey with 5<sup>th</sup> district residents
  - Most greatly affected by plan implementation
- Gathered natural resource managers to study and better understand the shoreline and adjacent aquatic health of the river
- City Administration and staff spent a Friday afternoon biking the rail and trail alignment
- Meetings with LS&M Railroad to discuss their concerns, business plan and budget options
- Worked with Federal Rail Administration to understand the overall rail health and maintenance needs

Luukkala: Explained that although the conversation is about what infrastructure should be on the ground, it is also about community values and looking at the use of the different infrastructure being assessed. Highlighted the following from the 5<sup>th</sup> District phone survey:

- When asked how they felt about the rail, 46% of respondents felt the LS&M Railroad was somewhat important to them, 64% believed the rail was important to the entire community, and 11% said they used it at least 4 times per year (rail runs weekends June through October)
- When asked how they felt about the trail, 64% of respondents indicated the trail was important to them, 74% believed the trail was important to the entire community, and 48% said they used the trail at least 4 times a year
- When asked a follow-up question about the trail extension, 83% of respondents were supportive of extending the trail
- When respondents were asked if it was not feasible for the City to do a rail and trail option, 54% of respondents said they would choose the trail, 32% said rail, and 14% said they had no preference.

Luukkala: Explained that the set guiding principles help them provide recommendations, which they asked respondents to prioritize, noting the following outcome:

- There was a tie for the two most important principles; environmentally sustainable and technically/economically feasible
- Third most valued principle was creating an accessible river front for as many people as possible regardless of income and physical ability
- Fourth was developing a plan that preserves historically significant resources
- Last was connecting community and economic involvement

Luukkala: Explained that from the community and past and current Administration, there is a theme that continued to arise which put great value to accessibility and equity. Noted members in the neighborhoods adjacent to the river that have never been able to connect with the river, describing the importance of creating opportunities and reducing financial barriers. Described the importance of historic preservation of current resources, noting both Spirit Island and the railroad are eligible for state historic registry. Explained there is heavy river, shore land and wetland restoration with this



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project, therefore seeking consultation from subject experts regarding the river's health and potential opportunities was important.

Luukkala: Provided the City's recommendations in proposing a rail and trail combination with a few adjustments, noting a compromise is necessary between the two. The following recommendation details were highlighted:

- Starting at the current western terminus of the trail, it would continue on, linear to the existing LS&M rail excursion experience heading south from Spirit Lake Marina
- As the trail continues, it is set on the riverside and the track is re-aligned for roughly 1200 feet
  - fixes problem of having a trail between two sets of rail
- The second segment leaving from Munger Landing is where the trail would deviate away from the water's edge, allowing for a rail in this segment to continue.
- At Blackmer Park the trail would slope back down and be tight to shoreline adjacent to the rail
  - separation most likely being a fence like the Lakewalk
- Eventually the trail would enter the US Steel site and go past Slag Place Park and continue on to Wire Mill Pond
  - proposing Wire Mill Pond to be open water for aquatic habitat restoration
- Continuing further south to Boat House Point, where the rail causeway is removed from Mud Lake
  - rail to make a turnaround at this location to allow for restoration of Mud Lake.
- These recommendations would open 92 acres of wetland and connect aquatic habitat from the open lake to the shoreline

Luukkala: Described the 5<sup>th</sup> segment recommendation as a traditional rail to trail conversion from Boy Scout Landing to Perch Lake. Explained the associated cost with this plan is \$3.4 million, noting that segments one, two and three could be finished in the near term as part of the cleanup, with the remaining segments in the next four to five years. Shared that the group is aware there are competing interests and the compromise has been challenging to arrive at, however they feel strongly this compromise is strong and creates strong benefits in spite of any trade-offs. Encouraged everyone to visit the website to review the plan documents and provide their recommendations for the next two weeks using the comment form, noting that after the comments are assessed a draft master plan will be available for public review, eventually being presented to the Parks Commission and City Council for approval.

Schmidt: Thanked Ms. Luukkala and applauded her excellent work. Apologized for a lack of attendance.

Isnerhagen: Commended Ms. Luukkala on her work in steering this project along.

Schmidt: Requested information regarding the environmental impact of the causeway.

Williams: Explained the rail bed was placed in the late 1860s and early 1870s, not next to the river, but in the river for the most part. Described how this created a berm like barrier between water to the west, which used to be connected to the river as a whole, to the water to the east that is the river. Explained that this has caused significant, progressive harm to the health of the river, particularly at



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locations where that connectivity is ecologically important like the mouth of Stewart Creek, the mouth of Wire Mill Pond and Mud Lake.

Williams: Shared that by cutting off the water flow you diminish the capacity of water, organism and nutrients to transit back and forth, additionally altering water flow patterns in what was once open water. Described the ecological opportunities associated with removing the rail causeway at specific areas. Explained that values are prioritized differently at the three locations, noting that at Stewart Creek and Wire Mill Pond, where the amount of open water is far less, the rail experience and historic rail road was prioritized. Continued by describing Mud Lake, where the amount of open water is several times greater, therefore putting the health of the river and its restoration as a top priority.

Schmidt: Questioned what the short and long term affects will be to the rail with the removal of a segment, noting the importance of the Commission in being knowledgeable of all options.

Williams: Explained that because the City lacked a breadth of depth of natural resource science professionals in-house, a large group of natural scientists were convened from federal, state, local and non-profit groups to help identify the health of the river and the opportunities to reverse harm to the river. Described the feedback they received, which identified a wide gap in ecological significance between fully reopening Mud Lake and merely penetrating the berm with a number of culverts. Explained that because answers need to be clear and scientifically correct, they have asked their partners to convene and come up with a restoration plan and fact sheet for the public.

Schmidt: Requested clarification on the reasoning behind recommending not to continue the rail past Mud Lake.

Williams: Explained that beyond the financials, it comes down to the grades and angles being clearly prohibited.

Schmidt: Questioned if the City is open to discussion with the rail on potential development at the terminus to help them as changes are made.

Luukkala: Explained there is opportunity to negotiate or collaborate regarding their excursion and programming, noting the importance of communication.

Westerlund: Questioned if there was a more itemized cost breakdown per linear foot for each option, which would show the full rail to trail conversion versus the projected cost to maintain the full rail and have a trail.

Williams: Responded that a traditional rail to trail conversion for the full extension came in at about \$4 million, noting their recommendations are \$2.5 million less.

Schmidt: Questioned if the City will continue financial commitments with the rail.

Williams: Confirmed that Mayor Larson is beginning a reexamination with City Council and the community regarding how tourism tax proceeds are allocated to attractions like the LS&M Railroad.





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Schmidt: Questioned if there were political or environmental repercussions of not doing anything to Stewart Creek and Wire Mill Pond.

Williams: Explained that the recommendation is a compromise that everyone can be unhappy with, noting that legally there are no known complications.

Schmidt: Discussed the comment made at last night’s public meeting which brought up concerns about potentially diverting money from restoration to recreation and the train.

Williams: Explained there are a number of different funding streams that will need to be drawn upon to fund cleanup from Riverside to Mud Lake, each one having different restrictions on its uses. Noted the different kinds of partners they have, using US Steel as an example as it will require a much different conversation in regards to contribution than say a grantor.

Schmidt: Requested the projected maintenance costs at the water access points be shared sooner than later, and questioned how they determine which improvements to make at each location and how they address overbuilding.

Luukkala: Explained that unlike other Mini-Master Plans, which typically last about ten years, this plan has a longer vision and lifespan, which will be considered during implementation. Highlighted the opportunities they have with agency partners regarding remediation, restoration, revitalization and recreation. Described the remediation area as an opportunity to come together with state and federal partners to enhance the area and draft a Mini-Master Plan.

Williams: Noted that water access site maintenance is complicated because two of the existing sites are jointly maintained by the City and the DNR.

Schmidt: Questioned which two sites were jointly maintained.

Luukkala: Confirmed there is an agreement with the MN DNR for Boy Scout Landing and Munger Landing, meaning they do more of the long term maintenance. Noted that because of this relationship, additional opportunities from their funding streams are made available for site improvements. Explained the DNR has the ability to draw funding through portions of the license fees they collect.

Williams: Confirmed that implementation at these sites will be negotiated with the DNR, whereas Slag Point will be owned by US Steel, requiring a joint maintenance agreement.

Schmidt: Requested additional information about the comments made at last night’s public meeting regarding kayaks and sand beach areas needing an area to dock.

Luukkala: Explained there are a lot of different facilities and infrastructure options for non-motorized launches, such as pier docking or water access with a boardwalk like facility to the water’s edge. Described their involvement with the National Water Trail folks in understanding the different types of



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infrastructure they can place at the different locations, which will be utilized later down the road.

Schmidt: Questioned if the group has checked to ensure every neighborhood has a defined access trail to the water’s edge.

Luukkala: Explained that about a year and a half ago, 11 neighborhood Mini-Master Plans for the St. Louis River Corridor were presented, noting that many of these neighborhoods do not currently have access, however the plans indicate trail access as a strong goal.

Schmidt: Addressed Commissioners and noted the of encouraging organizations to reach out to youth to make sure that recreation is accessible.

Luukkala: Shared that shoreline fishing is another common use of the area, which is being take into account.

Schmidt: Questioned what type of feedback they were receiving from neighbors.

Luukkala: Explained that it’s hard to quantify as they do not receive location specifics on each comment submitted, however they feel the general consensus from neighbors is excitement regarding connection to the river.

Williams: Noted recommendations from the Riverside small area plan and Morgan Park revitalization plan to connect to the river by extending the Western Waterfront Trail.

Luukkala: Described how this plan will connect neighborhoods together, giving kids in Riverside the opportunity to bike to basketball practice at Blackmer Park for example. Explained that currently the only route is Grand Avenue/Highway 23.

Bill Lynch (public): Discussed the cost of the rail to trail option, noting how he understood the plan originally as the rail being replaced by US Steel, and a causeway would be rebuilt at no cost to the City. Requested confirmation if adding the trail and having to move the train is what creates a cost.

Luukkala: Referred group to the image on the screen which displayed the breakdown of trail segments by cost, noting the area Mr. Lynch was referring to as segment there, which is the EPA and US Steel cleanup site. Clarified that this specific area will be replaced at no cost.

Bill Lynch (public): Questioned if just the train was kept would that equate to zero cost.

Luukkala: Clarified that the study was not to keep just the rail, rather rail and trail or a rail to trail conversion in the context of extending the Western Waterfront Trail.

Bill Lynch (public): Shared that this is not the only area where a causeway interrupts water, noting the Great Salt Lake as being divided by a train, however solutions were put in place to mitigate problems, and therefore solutions are available.



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## IX. Old Business

Jim Filby Williams, Public Administration Director, City of Duluth, shared that the City is still in the process of hiring a new Parks Manager. Explained the search was narrowed to three finalists and after a series of oral exams and interviews, one candidate was determined to be a good fit, and they are waiting on the answer from this candidate. Further explained that in the event this candidate declines, he has a strong transition plan in place.

## X. Division Manager’s Report

Schmidt: Noted the Parks and Recreation Master Plan document that was given to the newest Commissioners, encouraging them to become familiar with it. Shared the second document given to the Commissioners which was put together by COGGS, requesting volunteers that would be willing to teach mountain biking skills to at risk youth.

Kathy Bergen: Provided an update on additional staffing changes within Parks, noting that Parks Recreation Specialist, Josh Abraham, submitted his resignation and is no longer with the Division. Explained the position will be posted in the coming days. Highlighted the positions primary function as working with youth and adult sport leagues for ball fields and courts. Updated Commissioners on her time left with Parks, explaining she has only three days remaining.

## XI. Public Comment

## XII. Adjournment

Meeting adjourned by President Schmidt at 6:55pm.

## XIII. Next Meeting

The next meeting will be Wednesday July 12, 2017 at 5pm in the City Hall Council Chambers.