

Natural Resources Commission

Meeting Minutes June 19, 2019

Attendance: Commissioners: John Lindgren, Brandon Van Tassel, Nancy Schuldt, Susan Stanich, Judy Gibbs, Brandon Krumwiede, Mike Schrage, Mike Pennington.

City Staff: Jim Filby Williams, Director of Administration; Diane Desotelle, Natural Resources Coordinator; Clark Christenson, Forester; Jennifer Ondrik, Administrative Clerical Specialist.

Call to Order:

The meeting started at 6:02 pm.

Public Comment Period: No comments

New Business:

Commissioner Roles (Jim Filby Williams – Director of Public Administration)

Jim welcomed the new and returning commissioners to the first meeting and shared some relevant history with the group. He communicated that the intent of the Commission was to take a critical look at the many natural resources issues and to provide technically sound advice on Duluth's extraordinary resources. The three reoccurring goals of this body are to (1) provide a public outlet and voice for natural resource issues, (2) to make strategic decisions regarding city owned and managed lands, and (3) to provide science based advice on the potential impacts of natural and anthropogenic disturbances.

Jim emphasized that this group was by definition an advisory group, but also stressed the importance of this group's advice and indicated it will have influence and weight.

He urged the Commissioners to think about their role as separate from any of their other affiliations, employers or advocacy groups, and emphasized that when weighing in on issues they are to attempt to be exclusive in their decisions. He further explained that their advisement shouldn't be in a vacuum but rather in a specific context amongst the plethora of preexisting regulations, laws, and plans that help shape this unique authority. He counseled that the group would need to invest great time and care into understanding these guiding documents (Comp Plan, UDC, etc) and highlighted that the Commission would be responsible to robustly justify decisions that significantly depart from the City's plans, policies and ordinances.

Susan Stanich commented that historically the Urban Forest Commission's input wasn't sought out. Jim replied that Natural Resources work is more planned based and that City staff would be responsible to support decisions made by this group and further explained that the City was sincere in its intent on obtaining this groups input. Jim remarked that it would be the role of City staff (Diane Desotelle & Clark Christenson) to funnel back the NRC's advice to Administration and other commissions. John Lindgren stated that if this group is to act as an advisory group then timing is critical to allow time to investigate, deliberate, discuss and determine the best solutions to issues. He further stated that if this group was to provide technically sound science based decisions and timely advice that they need data.

Bylaws & Officers (Clark Christenson – City Forester)

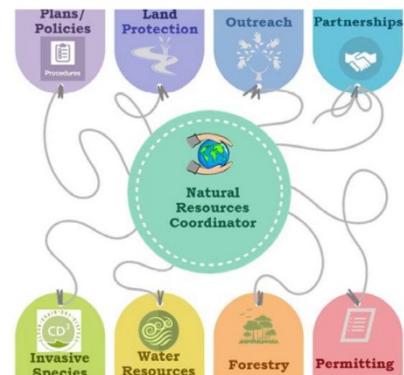
Clark, Diane and Jennifer worked with the City Attorney to develop the draft bylaws for the commission. Clark emphasized that the bylaws are meant mainly to direct how these meetings will happen and the group's general processes. Jim commented that the Commissions purpose was bound most meaningfully to the [Ordinance](#) that established the Commission. The group requested that the full purpose, as referenced in the ordinance, be added to the bylaws. Additionally, the group requested that language on the rescheduling of regular meetings due to unforeseen circumstances was incorporated. These items will be added and the draft bylaws emailed to Commissioners later in June. The Commission will vote to adopt the bylaws in July.

Clark informed the Commission that officer positions would need to be elected. Self-nominations are to be emailed to Jennifer Ondrik (jondrik@duluthmn.gov) by July 5 for incorporation into the July agenda. Officers will often be asked to help set final agendas. Jim Filby Williams encouraged the Commissioners to strongly consider voting in both a former and a new commissioner as Chair/Vice Chair. He explained the reason behind this is that it may help us in shaping a new culture.

Jim shared additional comments on the importance of this body being strategic in *all* matters and emphasized that City staff (the Natural Resources Coordinator & City Forester) and their hours are a very limited but that the Commissioners should use them as a resource. He also offered advice on the bylaws, indicating that it's best to treat them like a constitution. The group discussed the need for a City Councilor to act as a liaison to this Commission. Jim agreed to follow up with the Clerks office to obtain guidance on this issue.

Natural Resources Report (Diane Desotelle– Natural Resources Coordinator)

Diane gave a presentation to the Commission entitled, "Managing for Duluth's Natural Resources." The group discussed the opportunity to re-shape how we interact with the natural world and brainstormed some meaningful words/ideas. Diane highlighted the governing principals for Open Space and shared that these principals are what drives Duluth's Open Space plans for the future and what staff, commissions and the City Council use to make decision. She urged the Commissioners to become familiar with these principals and highlighted those that reinforce the City's vision to protect and manage our natural resources. She indicated there are many policies related to open space and asked the group to incorporate these concepts into project discussions. She provided some data to gain a perspective on just how much open space (both natural areas and parkland) Duluth is blessed with per capita compared to other cities of similar population size. She explained the varied work of a Natural Resources Coordinator and spoke briefly about the importance of each of these categories (see graphic). Diane discussed her three top focus areas: (1) Protection of public lands, (2) Building a Natural Resources Management Plan, (3) Ordinances and Policies. Diane highlighted the Duluth Natural Areas Program (DNAP) and explained that it provides the ability to nominate certain lands with environmental value as permanent open space. Hartley was nominated in 2018 and the St. Louis River Corridor was nominated in 2019. Both areas require the need to develop management plans this year. She will be forming smaller working subcommittees for each management plan with the assistance of interested commissioners and outside partners. Diane concluded her presentation by thanking the Commissioners in helping her with the charge of protecting, restoring and managing our public open spaces and natural areas.



Forester's Report (Clark Christenson – City Forester)

Clark introduced himself to the group as the City Forester and shared his positions responsibilities and priorities. He indicated he had two “hands”; the bigger of the hand manages street trees and the smaller hand manages our urban forest & natural areas. Currently, he and his crew are completely engulfed with the Emerald Ash Borer work. He is continuing his charge to remove these trees (average of 400 per year), grind stumps & treat trees moving east to west throughout the City. Trees that are over 12 inches in diameter are injected with the EAB insecticide and are expected to live an additional 2-3 years. He explained that this insecticide is very expensive and indicated on average Park Maintenance spends \$10,000-\$15,000 a year to keep these trees on the landscape until crews have time to circle back around and remove them. Not injecting the trees is a safety concern as affected trees become very brittle and dangerous in the right conditions. Clark shared some good news though that the Minnesota Department of Agriculture is indicating the severity of the 2019 winter could have killed some of the overwintering EAB grubs. If this is so, it will buy the forestry crews additional time to manage the City’s ash resource. For additional information see:

<https://www.dnr.state.mn.us/invasives/terrestrialanimals/eab/winter.html>

Clark indicated that he was in the process of conducting a City-wide tree inventory. Parks Maintenance has hired a temporary employee who is assisting this season. He shared that in a world “beyond EAB” he would like to complete the inventory and develop a Forestry management plan. The group discussed the cost and option of contracting out the EAB work or looking for grant funds to assist. Clark explained that he was fortunate to have already received two grants: (1) \$175,000 from the Great Lakes Restoration Initiative / US Forest Service, this money will be used to replace trees and provide an education piece. (2) \$65,000 from the MN Department of Natural Resources – these funds are strictly for the removal of ash trees. Clark stated that he was excited to get going on this inventory as historically the tree information was patchy at best. He further explained that once we have an idea of what kind and how many trees we have including locations we can begin to look at the scope of potential issues and develop an efficient strategy for solutions. Clark thanked the Commissioners for their service and agreed he would share any and all data he has to assist them in making strategic and timely science based decisions.

The group discussed the duration of the meeting and concluded that we would like to attempt to have an aspirational time cap of two hours. Diane indicated she would be sending out some homework assignments on open space, DNAP, and policies. She will also be sending out the PowerPoint from tonight’s meeting. Jim Filby Williams encouraged the Commissioners to volunteer for Diane’s DNAP subcommittees and to send in officer nominations for July’s vote.

Adjournment:

There was a motion to adjourn the meeting at 8:18 PM, M/S/C.