



NATURAL RESOURCES COMMISSION

Meeting Minutes February 1, 2023
Duluth City Hall, Conference Room 330

I. Call to Order

Chair Lindgren called the meeting to order at 6:00 p.m.

II. Roll Call

Commissioners Present: Lori Dando, Judy Gibbs, Sophia Green, John Lindgren, Nancy Schuldt, Andrew Streitz
Absent: Mike Schrage, Tiffany Sprague

Staff Present: Matt Andrews, Allison Brooks, Jim Filby Williams, Kate Kubiak

III. Approval of the Agenda

Commissioner Dando made a motion to approve the agenda; seconded by Commissioner Streitz. Unanimously approved.

IV. Approval of the December 7, 2022 Meeting Minutes

Vice Chair Schuldt made a motion to approve the December 7, 2022 meeting minutes with revision; seconded by Commissioner Dando. Unanimously approved.

V. Old Business

A.) Strategic Public Lands Re-Alignment Update

Kubiak provided a summary of the ongoing Lands Re-Alignment process, which consists of a collaborative process to convey land from tax-forfeit St. Louis County to the City of Duluth for protection. Williams commented that one factor affecting the timeline for the conveyance is the presence of existing easements on some of the parcels. The easements complicates the conveyance process because the easement or lease portion of the property must be separated from the remainder of the parcel prior to conveyance. Kubiak stated that the City has secured an extension for the grant that is funding the conveyances. Commissioner Streitz asked if the parcels will be conveyed as they are able. Kubiak responded that the City and County seek to group many parcels for conveyance rather than individual or small groups of parcels to maximize efficiency.

B.) Tischer Creek & Hartley Pond Feasibility Study Update

Kubiak provided an overview of the purpose and rationale for the Feasibility Study citing the previous directives in City Council approved documents. There are four alternatives being considered in the Study including: 1) remove dam and establish new stream channel, 2) perform no action, 3) divert Tischer Creek around Hartley Pond, or 4) convert Hartley Dam into rock arch rapids. Williams stated that the ideal outcome of the Study would be to accomplish two goals, preserving and restoring the recreation and aesthetic value of the pond, and mitigating the ecological impact of the dam on the downstream ecological conditions.

Kubiak commented that the Study is only to evaluate options and no action will be taken until the Study is completed and the Parks and Recreation Commission, Natural Resources Commission, and City Council approve an action, which could include taking no action or pursuing one of the proposed options. Williams supplemented that there is a strong desire to make improvements to support City goals in alignment with



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public values. If the decision is to take no action, that will result in the further degradation of both the pond and the trout stream. Chair Lindgren commented that the dam also prohibits connectivity and that there are potential funding opportunities that would support the restoration of connectivity.

The first of three public information meetings will be February 23, 2023 at 7:00 p.m. at Hartley Nature Center.

VI. New Business

A.) Introduction of new Commissioner, Andrew Streit

Chair Lindgren introduced the new commissioner, Andrew Streit.

B.) Trails through Duluth Natural Areas [Matt Andrews, Trails Coordinator]

Andrews provided an overview of the scope of trails that are maintained within the Duluth Natural Areas. Andrews is collaborating with Kubiak to develop signage for the Duluth Natural Areas Program to improve awareness and education.

Magney Snively Natural Area – Andrews said there are no further trail developments or additions planned. The existing trails will have future improvements to support multi-use. In summer 2022, portions of the Ely's Peak Loop were hardened to allow equestrian use in the summer months through a grant from the Minnesota Trail Riders Association. Williams added that there have been multiple plans guiding trail development in Magney Snively including the Magney Snively Natural Area Management Plan, St. Louis River Corridor Trails Plan, Duluth Traverse Plan, and the DWP Trail System Plan.

St. Louis River Natural Area – Andrews said the Estuary Water Trail connects the sections of the Natural Area and there are ongoing conversations and planned improvements to improve the access points, including the MN DNR restoration at Munger Landing. The 3.3-mile Waabizheshikana: The Marten Trail, formerly known as the Western Waterfront Trail, will be extended in 2024 to Wire Mill Pond. Commissioner Green asked if there are any plans to connect Waabizheshikana to Grassy Point. Williams responded that during the planning process for the trail, the community expressed a strong preference for not connecting the trail there due to the extensive industrial uses in the area conflicting with the goal of a natural experience. Andrews commented that there is work started to connect through the neighborhood to the Cross-City Trail. Commissioner Green commented that there have been surveys completed regarding user experience around Kingsbury Bay and Grassy Point.

Chair Lindgren commented that there are significant funding opportunities for environmental justice and asked if there are plans to improve the connections at Grassy Point. Williams responded that the City is pursuing the funding opportunity and that one component is to improve connection from the parking area at Grassy Point to the restored waterfront. Commissioner Green commented that there is a public perception of reduced safety from a lack of connectivity. Williams responded that with the Natural Area, the priority is to concentrate any future land on already impacted land rather than developing natural lands. Commissioner Green asked if there are plans to complete the Grassy Point trail where the boardwalk was removed. Williams responded that the City has submitted a grant request to complete the trail to the edge of the



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water with crushed stone.

Hartley Natural Area – Andrews summarized that there is an existing, extensive trail network at Hartley and that there are no plans to add more trails. The City works with volunteer organizations to maintain the trails, such as working with the Duluth Foot Trails Alliance to assess and consolidate social trails and neighborhood connections to improve access and reduce impact.

Andrews highlighted that there is an online parks and trails map available on the Parks & Recreation webpage. Another option is to download the Avenza App, which has the City of Duluth maps and are geo-referenced to allow navigation without access to internet when out on the trail.

Chair Lindgren commented that the community is lucky to have such diverse and high quality trail system and asked what the policy will be, particularly in Natural Areas, for e-bikes. Andrews responded that the City will follow the State recommended guidelines. There are three classifications of e-bikes, which are, by State Law, bicycles and therefore allowed to be used on bicycle trails. The City does not anticipate any policy changes. Vice Chair Schuldt asked if it would be possible to approach the vendors to govern speeds. Andrews responded that there are a few different vendors for e-bikes and scooters in Duluth. The scooters have more advanced technology including geo-fenced barriers that govern speed down, such as along the Lakewalk. The e-bikes have not established the same capabilities, and many of the e-bikes are privately owned. Chair Lindgren commented that it would be beneficial to provide access to trails for adaptive equipment. Andrews concurred that electronic assist is important for accessibility.

Commissioner Streitz commented that the uniformity of the signage at Magney Snively has made a significant improvement to user experience and made the Natural Area easier to navigate. Chair Lindgren commented that the signage improvements have been good, and that a beneficial next step would be to improve trailheads. Andrews agreed and stated that there remain opportunities to improve trailheads for user experience and natural resources to improve site sustainability.

VII. Staff Reports

A.) Natural Resources Coordinator Report [Kate Kubiak]

Kubiak provided a report on recent projects and activities. Kubiak highlighted that the City Forester is working to secure trees for tree planting, as it is expected that the demand on nurseries will grow as urban forestry nationally gains an influx of investment from federal funding opportunities. Commissioner Gibbs asked for an update on the status of working with Community Action Duluth. Kubiak responded that the City is currently exploring opportunities to work with them on the recently awarded Sustain Our Great Lakes grant, which will fund invasive plant removal in Hartley Natural Area and the Kingsbury Bay watershed.

B.) Director's Report [Jim Filby Williams]

Williams provided an update regarding the recent request to authorize a half and half tourism tax, which has previously been the funding source for improvements in the St. Louis River Corridor. The renewal would support investment in athletics facilities. While there would be no opportunity for land restoration through the proposed funding, it does support the continuation of the natural resources budget: investing in athletics



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facilities will reduce the pressure on the Parks Fund. The City is also exploring opportunities to increase funding from tourism allocations for Park Maintenance. This would also alleviate pressure on the Parks Fund, which is used to provide funding for natural resources projects.

VIII. Announcements

Vice Chair Schuldt announced that the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service draft Natural Resources Damage Assessment Plan for the U.S. Steel site is available for public comment. The Plan includes a proposal for how damages and injuries resulting from the U.S. Steel contamination will be assessed.

IX. Public Comment

Betty Greene provided a comment regarding the stormwater protection parcels that will be within the Lands Re-Alignment.

X. Adjournment

Vice Chair Schuldt made a motion to adjourn; second by Commissioner Streit. Unanimously approved.
Meeting adjourned at 7:15 p.m.

Next Meeting - Wednesday, March 1 at 6:00 p.m. in Duluth City Hall, Conference Room 330.