



NATURAL RESOURCES COMMISSION

MEETING MINUTES

July 3, 2024 – 6:00 p.m.

Lakeside Conference Room 430, City Hall

I. Call to Order

Chair Lindgren called the meeting to begin at 6:00 PM.

II. Roll Call

Commissioners Present: Pam Foster, Judy Gibbs, John Lindgren, Mike Raichel, Nancy Schuldt, Tiffany Sprague, Andrew Streitz

City Staff Present: Kate Kubiak, Jim Filby Williams

Absent: Lori Dando, Mike Schrage

III. Approval of the Agenda

Commissioner Schuldt made a motion to approve the agenda; seconded by Commissioner Raichel. Unanimously approved.

IV. Approval of the May 1, 2024 Meeting Minutes

Commissioner Foster made a motion to approve; seconded by Commissioner Streitz. Unanimously approved.

V. Old Business

A. Hartley Pond and Dam Feasibility Study Timeline Update

Director Filby Williams provided an update that City staff have been working internally to determine next steps for the project. There is conditional approval to proceed and staff anticipate bringing recommendations forward at the August Natural Resources Commission and Parks and Recreation Commission meetings. After that, a resolution of intent would go before City Council for review. Public comments were received in the form of a survey and general web comment forms. Director Filby Williams characterized the majority of comments as positive, with many expressing concerns about the potential loss of Hartley Pond. A minority of negative comments provided valuable information and raised valid concerns regarding downstream property owners. Commissioner Streitz asked if the City has been alarmed by the failure of the Mankato Dam. Director Filby Williams responded that there is considerable expertise in the City's engineering office and that staff can reach out to provide context about the Mankato case in comparison to the Hartley Dam.

VI. New Business

A. Duluth Designated Natural Areas – Management Progress

Kubiak provided an overview of the management progress for the three designated Duluth Natural Areas: St. Louis River, Hartley, and Magney-Snively. The St. Louis River Area includes restoration projects at Perch Lake and Mud Lake, as well as wild rice restoration along the River. Invasive species removal is in progress at Chambers Grove, North Bay, Blackmer Park, and Kingsbury Bay. The City has acquired tax forfeit property that will be incorporated into the St. Louis River Area. These parcels will be brought before the Natural Resources Commission to determine recommendation to include them with the designated Natural Area, then to Planning Commission, and finally City Council for approvals. Chair Lindgren and the commissioners discussed the alignment for Waabizheshikana: The Marten Trail and redevelopment of upland areas for outdoor recreation.

The Hartley Natural Area management plan is progressing well, which includes the completion of the Hartley Pond and Dam Feasibility Study and construction of stormwater best management practices for Woodland Avenue. Additional activities include vernal pool mapping, tree planning in the deer enclosure, development of a Hartley Invaders volunteer group, and extensive buckthorn removal throughout the park. The City applied for a new Board of Soil and Water Resources Habitat Enhancement Landscape Program grant to support buckthorn



NATURAL RESOURCES COMMISSION

MEETING MINUTES

May 1, 2024 – 6:00 p.m.

Lakeside Conference Room 430, City Hall

control and planting of native species. There are significant interagency partners and grants to support the management actions in Hartley.

The Magney-Snively management plan is currently being renewed with funding from the Sustain Our Great Lakes grant program by the Minnesota Land Trust in partnership with the City. The previous plan is relatively limited in the management actions and the new plan will provide more detailed actions. Multiple surveys are currently in progress to inform the plan. A working group will be formed in the fall of 2024 and the plan will be developed in 2025, with an approval process to follow. Chair Lindgren asked how the management plan will be implemented since there is no dedicated partner for the Magney-Snively Natural Area. Kubiak responded that there is a question of capacity and planning for implementation.

Streitz asked about the proposed nomination of the Hawk Ridge Nature Reserve as a new Natural Area. Kubiak responded that the Hawk Ridge Bird Observatory has begun preparing a nomination and that staff are excited to collaborate with the Observatory to develop a strong, complete nomination package.

VII. Staff Reports

A. Natural Resources Coordinator's Report – Kate Kubiak

Kubiak provided the following written report. There were no questions.

- Continued moving Hartley Pond Feasibility Study process moving forward. Held public input meeting May 23 and completed public input survey (see public comments forwarded to you with the agenda).
- Continued coordination with USACE for the Section 111 MN Point Study. Held public Meeting with USACE staff on June 3.
- Submitted Habitat Enhancement Landscape Program grant for restoration work in Hartley.
- Continued serving on Headwaters partnership Board and on St. Louis River Habitat Work Group.
- Helping SWCD and DNR with Buckingham Creek Restoration Project – work starting in July.
- Arrowhead Bowhunters Alliance support.
- Met with Park Point residents, DNR staff and contractor to remove invasive baby's breath in the dunes.
- Working with consultant regarding newly acquired Park Hill land. Reviewing native plant community data, report and recommended restoration actions.

B. Forester's Report – Clark Christenson

The City Forester provided the following written report:

Spring has come and gone, but we are still planting trees. The weather has been great for reducing transplant shock and we have had excellent success so far. As of June 26th, we have planted 428 trees this year. Combined with fall planting and some more over the next week, we should have over 700 trees planted this year.

Staff will soon move into ash removals and stump grinding. We still have months of work in both those categories. The greenhouse site preparation is mostly done and then assembly can begin.

C. Director's Report – Jim Filby Williams

Director Filby Williams provided a brief update on the acquisition of tax forfeit parcels from St. Louis County. The City now holds all titles of the former tax forfeit lands, and the process of designating parcels as parkland or



NATURAL RESOURCES COMMISSION MEETING MINUTES

May 1, 2024 – 6:00 p.m.

Lakeside Conference Room 430, City Hall

incorporation into the Duluth Natural Areas Program has begun. The State of Minnesota has passed new legislation regarding tax forfeit land management, which will impact future acquisition. The City will need to continue working in close partnership with St. Louis County.

VIII. Announcements

Barb Huberty from the Minnesota Pollution Control Agency provided an update that the US Spirit Lake restoration project is nearing completion. A ribbon cutting will be held on July 10 at 2:00 PM at the Falcon Street trail access point. A guided hike will also be provided at 6:30 PM by project partners featuring a tour of the various restoration work that was completed on site. Additional upland site restoration and long-term monitoring will be required. In total, the restoration was \$186.5 million. The natural resource damage assessment process is underway for the site.

Director Filby Williams added that the ribbon cutting will also include thanking US Steel for their completion and financing of 100% of the cost of the accessible trail that will be an extension (segment 3) of Waabizheshikana: The Marten Trail. Through an upcoming agreement, the City will own 91 acres of this former US Steel site, including the land for the trail.

IX. Public Comment

None.

X. Adjournment

Commissioner Schuldt made a motion to adjourn, Commissioner Foster seconded. Meeting adjourned at 7:45 PM.

Next Meeting – August 7, 2024 at 6:00 p.m. Lakeside Conference Room 430, City Hall