



NATURAL RESOURCES COMMISSION

MEETING MINUTES

September 3, 2025 – 6:00 p.m.
Conference Room 330, City Hall

I. Call to Order

Chair Streitz called the meeting to begin at 6:01 PM.

II. Roll Call

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

City Staff Present: Jim Filby Williams, Kate Kubiak, Clark Christenson, Jessica Peterson, Bronwyn Bauer

III. Approval of the Agenda

Chair Streitz amended the agenda to allow guest David Demmer, President of the Parks and Recreation Commission, to speak after the Parks Fund presentation. Chair Streitz also moved the Old Business Advocacy item to after the presentation. Commissioner Dando made a motion to approve the agenda as amended; seconded by Commissioner Foster. Unanimously approved.

IV. Approval of the August 6, 2025 Meeting Minutes

Commissioner Raichel noted a one-word change in section VI B of the minutes – the work *marked* should be changed to *treated*. Commissioner Sprague made a motion to approve the amended minutes; seconded by Commissioner Foster. Unanimously approved.

V. Nomination and Election of Officers

Chair Streitz asked if anyone would like to nominate another commissioner, or themselves, for one of the officer positions. He said he, Vice Chair Schuldt and Secretary Gibbs are all willing to continue in their positions. Hearing no nominations, he asked the group to vote to keep Judy Gibbs as Secretary, Nancy Schuldt as Vice Chair, and Andrew Streitz as Chair. Unanimously approved.

VI. Old Business

A. Tischer Fish Kill Update (City Staff)

No update.

B. Solar Farm – Eden Renewables Response to NRC – (City Staff)

Bob Long, a consultant working with Eden Renewables, said that a short list of finalists for this project should be revealed next month, and as a next step, will be going to the Planning Commission in October.

Commissioner Foster asked if a final site was chosen for the project and Long said the Amity site was chosen.

C. Advocacy (Chair Streitz)

Commissioner Foster said that citizens love our parks, but doesn't think that the messaging of the critical situation of the Parks budget is getting out to them. Chair Streitz said that commissioners should attend Council meetings to talk about the NRC and the Parks budget, which will help get the word out to citizens. Commissioner Dando asked if staff numbers have gone up in the Parks division, since staff costs have gone up. Filby Williams said that the increase is mainly due to the collective bargaining unit's payroll increases. He also said that in the early 2000s, the number of staff was up to 26. The recession dropped this number to 5, then after the levy passed in 2011, the number grew to 9 staff. Currently there are 14.45 FTEs plus 14 temps/seasonal employees.



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VII. New Business

A. Historical Look Back at Park Fund – Informational Presentation - Jessica Peterson, Parks and Recreation Manager

Peterson gave a presentation about the state of the Parks budget and the fact that if nothing changes, the Parks Capital fund could be depleted by 2028, with no money to leverage projects. The original Park Fund Levy was a fixed \$2.6M for Parks & Rec operations, enhancement of routine park maintenance, and parks capital improvements. Because the levy is capped, General Fund allocations remain generally flat, and while operational costs increase, the amount of Capital funding decreases each year, as the cost to operate and do capital projects increases each year. Neighborhood parks suffer more because tourism tax funds can only be used for tourist destination parks. Chair Streitz asked how Council responded to this information, and Filby Williams said that there has been limited success telling this story. Vice chair Schuldt asked what percentage of the entire City budget the Parks budget is; Filby Williams said it is a little more than 3%.

Parks and Recreation Commission President David Demmer talked about the budget crisis the Parks and Rec division is nearing – they have been wrestling with this outcome for a while, but the situation is getting dire. He would like to reframe the discussion and bring in partners as allies and wants parks to be viewed as Critical Infrastructure. Demmer reiterated Peterson's presentation message and said the levy's \$2.6M was supposed to be a base, not a ceiling. There will be some difficult decisions ahead by the Council, Mayor and Parks and Recreation Commission, and some recommendations could include removing failing assets, sales of assets, and sponsorship possibilities. He would like to keep advocating during this budget period and believes partnerships, including with the NRC, will help get through this. Chair Streitz asked if the presentation has been shared with the City Council. The councilor liaison to Parks, Tara Swenson, has received it, but is not sure if she shared it with other councilors.

B. Skyline Parkway Viewshed Application – Clark Christenson, City Forester

Christenson said that he brings this application to the NRC as informational, with no action required. He said all the steps in this process were followed, he is comfortable moving forward and will oversee the process, which is on City land, not park land.

VIII. Staff Reports

A. Natural Resources Coordinator's Report (Kate Kubiak)

- City staff reviewed Hartley Dam project agreement internally, sent to DNR for review.
- Presented to Outdoor Heritage Council with DNR and MN Land Trust to support our joint application for culvert replacement and forestry management work in Mission creek watershed.
- Compiled and sent out request for quotes for fall invasives removal work – knotweed and buckthorn, Hartley focused.
- Continued attending Hartley Stewardship committee meetings.
- Amity Hawk Ridge DNAP has been on hold due to key members being busy but the management plan development should be ramping up and will be advising them.
- Trying to move section 111 study forward, seems to be at standstill on fed's side. City doing all it can.
- Completed and sent off draft of Magney Snively Management Plan to Advisory Committee for review.
- Continues chairing St. Louis River Habitat Workgroup – quarterly meetings.
- Headwaters Partnership – attended another visioning meeting with several natural resources colleagues – making progress on how the next two focus areas will be presented for people to use and reference.



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B. Forester's Report (Clark Christenson)

- We continued and finished the mulching project. I was able to do a quick survey of Hawk Ridge and found that our treatment covered 51% of the area. Regeneration is about 1,000 stems/acre and Scots pine account for about 200 of them. That is a lower percentage than I was expecting, which is great.
- About 1 acre was mulched in the Amity/Lester ski trail area. It was predominantly brush species with a significant component of buckthorn. After looking at it firsthand and talking to the operator, I think we will seed in a small percentage of the area this next spring and leave the rest for a second treatment next year. The overstory of aspen is mature and there is a significant buckthorn issue. Tentatively, the plan is to retreat the area so further mulch the significant woody debris left on site then expand the area. Over time we will have three, hopefully expanding, areas of treatment. The outer ring will be mulched the first time, the next ring will have been mulched a second time and waiting for tree seed and the oldest, inner ring will have seedlings growing.
- We just completed ash and buckthorn removal along 59th Ave W above 8th Street. The right-of-way is fairly wide and that included a significant number of trees on the west side. You can now see the rock wall/cliff which was completely hidden by trees. There is more work to be done here; I think it is a unique area where anyone can get an up-close look at some of the natural heritage present in Duluth.

C. Director's Report (Jim Filby Williams)

None.

IX. Announcements

None.

X. Public Comment

Will Daniels wanted to know if selling assets means selling land. Filby Williams said that is a possibility. Josie LaPort, a member of the Parks and Recreation Commission, concurred with Peterson's presentation and Demmer's comments about the dire situation of the Parks Fund. She also believes the parks should be considered critical infrastructure and would like to see an ordinance passed confirming that, which would allow more funding eligibility. She thinks a simple policy could shift the outlook of this fund and level the playing field with other City divisions.

XI. Adjournment

Vice Chair Schuldt made a motion to adjourn; Commissioner Dando seconded. Meeting adjourned at 7:51 PM.

Next Meeting – October 1, 2025 at 6:00 PM Conference Room 330, City Hall.