



PARKS & RECREATION COMMISSION

Meeting Minutes May 14, 2025

Duluth City Hall, Council Chambers



I. Call Meeting to Order

President Demmer called the meeting to order at 5:02 p.m.

II. Roll Call

Present: David Demmer, Kala Pedersen, Beth Olson, Josie LaPorte, Terrance Lovejoy, Hailey Sigafus, Connie Cummins, Brooke Marinan

Not Present: Sarah Beehler, Dave Cizmas, Ashley Grimm – St. Louis County Commissioner, Tara Swenson – City Council Liaison, Stephanie Williams – School Board Liaison

III. Approval of the March 12 Meeting Minutes

Commissioner LaPorte motioned to approve the March 12 meeting minutes. Commissioner Marinan second. Unanimously approved. Motion carries.

IV. Presentations

A. Volunteer Recognition (Informational)

B. Parks 2024 Annual Report (Informational)

C. Lester-Amity-Hawk Ridge Designated Natural Area Nomination (Informational) Gini Breidenbach, Minnesota Land Trust

Lovejoy questioned if the \$2 million covers what is needed over the next 10 years. Tim Beaster stated that this amount is a low estimate of the amount of money that will be received over the next 10-20 years. Stated that as a part of developing the plan, this area becomes eligible for other sources of funding. Stated that Trout Unlimited is pursuing grant opportunities. Stated the plan is to start at Jean Duluth and work downstream and do as much as possible with the funding available.

Pedersen stated her thanks for the information and her support of the nomination.

Olson questioned how the development already present in this space would be affected by this process. Breidenbach stated that this nomination will not change anything that happens in the currently developed areas. Director Filby Williams stated that the boundary was drawn to intentionally exclude existing development as well as any lands that could conceivably be developed in the future.

LaPorte stated her support for the nomination and expressed thanks for the collaboration involved in this work.

Demmer questioned what would happen in the event of recreational organizations wanting to make significant changes to this area in the future. Director Filby Williams stated that this upcoming process of creating a management plan will provide some guidelines for what types of changes are allowed. Stated that there will need to be some kind of deliberative process to determine what will be allowed.

Demmer questioned if any proposed changes would come back to the PRC. Director Filby Williams stated that anything that fits within the natural area management plan would likely not come back to PRC. Stated that any significant changes would come before the Commission.

Demmer questioned when the Commission might expect a conversation on the designation of transferred



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lands as park land. Director Filby Williams stated that under state statute, these lands must be used for park purposes. Stated that this does not obligate formal designation as City park land but does provide protected status for the land. Stated that the Council previously passed a resolution of intent regarding protective designations for the newly acquired land, but the resolution is not binding on Council or administration. Stated that the timing of the designation is at Mayor Reinert's discretion.

Cummins questioned if consideration has been given to potential increase in users brought into this area. Director Filby Williams stated that the Duluth natural area ordinance is set up in anticipation of complicated questions to work through. Stated that a restoration and management plan would be developed over the next year and would address these types of questions.

Lovejoy questioned if the Amity Creek area across Jean Duluth Rd is controlled by the City and if the area was considered as a part of this area. Director Filby Williams stated that the City is still in the process of acquiring and assembling what will be a protected area in the upstream area of Amity Creek. Stated that these lands will not be a part of this nomination at this time but could be added to the DNAP later.

Commissioner LaPorte motioned that the Parks & Recreation Commission recommends approval of the Lester-Amity-Hawk Ridge Natural Area Nomination. Commissioner Pedersen second. Unanimously approved. Motion carries.

D. Park Fund Budget (Informational) Jessica Peterson

Demmer questioned what the gap is per year. Director Filby Williams stated that the estimate is about \$2 million. Stated that what is excluded in this number is neighborhood park assets.

Demmer questioned what next steps would be for the Commission to address this issue. Director Filby Williams stated that an educational foundation could be laid about the state of the problem. Stated that elevating the issue is a value in and of itself. Stated that the toughest challenge will be funding neighborhood parks.

Olson questioned if consideration has been made for a system-wide park use fee. Manager Peterson stated that the fee schedule would be the mechanism by which fees can be charged, and it is approved annually by Council. Stated that it is necessary for us to look across the industry for what options are available and determine what would work best for our community. Stated that fee collection can add costs as well. Stated that partners sometimes have membership fees that are invested in the park system through volunteer support in park spaces.

Olson questioned if a list of third-party partners could be shared with the Commission. Manager Peterson stated that a list of partners is included in the annual report.

LaPorte stated her appreciation for the historical perspective presented. Stated that there is likely not a quick fix to this problem; it will take conversation and collaboration. Stated that an approach would be to codify parks as critical infrastructure.

Cummins questioned if there are figures or charts that show the economic value of the park system. Director Filby Williams stated that there has not been a system-wide economic impact analysis, only analyses of specific parks. Stated that the importance of parks to community well-being is a powerful talking point. Stated that community surveys indicate that community members and visitors alike highly value Duluth parks and trails. Stated that an overall economic analysis could be a helpful step to take. Stated that virtually all of Duluth's recent business development is situated near destination parks and trails.



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Sigafus stated that there needs to be a balance between quality and quantity of parks. Director Filby Williams stated that with every construction project, we look at consolidation and how to reduce maintenance burden. Stated that consolidation that the community can support itself requires revenue.

Pedersen questioned what the process is for the annual budget and if this conversation could be brought to Council. Director Filby Williams stated that Parks presents a budget to Council annually. Stated that the process does not typically provide opportunity for characterizing budgetary needs. Stated that the budget presentation contains brief acknowledgment of the problems without calling for solutions. Manager Peterson stated that the budget process typically kicks off in June or July. Stated that the operating budget is developed first. Stated that what is left over is what is used to develop the capital plan. Stated that we are asked to bring annual operating budget and asked to prepare five year capital plans. Stated that there are other sources of funding that are added to the capital plan as well. Stated that the capital plan for 1-2 years is fairly strong, and the 3-5 years out is more loose projections.

Director Filby Williams stated that the capital budget problem is less about acreage and more about infrastructure. Stated that consolidation is focused more on amenities than park acreage.

Olson questioned how Parks can ask for more money from Council. Director Filby Williams stated that the current administration does not have a specific agenda for increasing funding for parks. Stated that the intent of this presentation is to provide information as requested. Stated that the Parks Commission can weigh in on issues as it wishes.

Demmer questioned if the Commission could make recommendations, for example, for the City to revisit the fee schedule or to look into sponsorships. Director Filby Williams stated that the Commission can make recommendations to staff, Council, and administration. Stated that a solution will need to have multiple strategies and will take several years.

LaPorte stated that Commissioners can leverage relationships to have conversations outside of the Parks Commission. Stated that Parks are assets and need to be protected.

Cummins stated that there are many businesses and nonprofit organizations that have a strong voice in the community.

Marinan stated that a recommendation could be to change the structure of funding from a fixed amount to a system that adjusts for inflation.

Peterson stated that an option to continue the public conversation is to add this topic as a standing Commission agenda item. Demmer stated that he will talk with Commissioners about how to go about this conversation and circle back at E-Board.

V. Commissioner Committees

Administrative (E-Board) meeting date: Thursday, June 5 at noon, Parks Conference Room - David Demmer, Kala Pedersen, Josie LaPorte [Jessica Peterson, Bridget Erickson]

VI. Commissioner & Liaison Reports

VII. New Business

VIII. Old Business



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IX. Division Report

Peterson highlighted the spring golf meeting in April.

X. Public Comment

XI. Adjournment

Meeting adjourned at 7:48 pm.

XII. Next Meeting

The next meeting will be Wednesday, June 11 at 5:00 p.m., Council Chambers.