



PARKS & RECREATION COMMISSION

Meeting Minutes June 11, 2025

Duluth City Hall, Council Chambers



I. Call Meeting to Order

Secretary LaPorte called the meeting to order at 5:00 p.m.

II. Roll Call

Present: Beth Olson, Josie LaPorte, Sarah Beehler, Dave Cizmas, Terrance Lovejoy, Brooke Marinar, Tara Swenson – City Council Liaison

Not Present: David Demmer, Kala Pedersen, Hailey Sigafus, Connie Cummins, Ashley Grimm – St. Louis County Commissioner, Stephanie Williams – School Board Liaison

III. Approval of the May 14 Meeting Minutes

Commissioner Olson motioned to approve the May 14 meeting minutes. Commissioner Lovejoy second. Unanimously approved. Motion carries.

IV. Presentations

A. Duluth Superior Sailing Association (Informational) Zachary Lange and Mike Sawinski

Olson questioned if members are involved in the maintenance of the boats. Lange stated that members are asked to contribute volunteer hours as a part of their membership. Stated that maintenance is an important part of their program. Stated that the board members and staff sometimes help with larger repairs.

Lovejoy questioned if there is a description on their website for what qualifies for accessible sailing. Lange stated that there is not a description on the website. Sawinski stated that anyone is welcome to sail and can try sailing without a membership.

Lovejoy questioned if life jackets are provided or rented. Lange stated that life jackets of all sizes are available to use.

Lovejoy questioned if there has been a connection with the Special Olympics. Sawinski stated that the first president of the organization was a paraplegic and built this organization to provide accessible sailing. Lange stated that there is no connection with the Olympics or structured race teams.

Lovejoy questioned what the difference is between levels of memberships. Lange stated that an annual membership covers the season. Stated that day memberships are for the day only, for experienced sailors.

Marinar questioned what the new program is called. Lange stated that the national organization is called US Blind Sailing and the upcoming program will be Duluth Blind Sailing. Stated that there will be six Thursday evening programs this summer, as well as a youth camp.

LaPorte questioned what their season is. Lange stated that it is typically mid-May through October 1. Stated that there is a calendar on the website, and they use social media to communicate. Stated that cancellations are also posted.

LaPorte questioned what they are looking for in terms of growth. Lange stated that they want newer boats with more adaptive capabilities. Stated that they would like more dock space. Stated that they have been growing in staff and participation. Stated that a goal is to have more of a structured building for their program. Sawinski stated that they would like to see a bigger footprint, restrooms, and a maintenance



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facility as a part of the upcoming Park Point Recreation Area plan.

LaPorte questioned what support the City could offer to the program. Lange stated that adding a restroom closer to their facilities would be helpful. Stated that increasing accessibility in and out of the pier would solve a lot of problems with boats drifting.

LaPorte questioned if their boat launch is in international waters. Sawinski stated that the waters are considered international due to the shipping industry, and they must follow strict Coast Guard rules.

Lovejoy questioned if their membership is primarily local or if there are any tourists. Lange stated that the majority is local, but approximately 10% of the users are from out of town.

B. Lake Superior Zoo Main Building Pre-Design Study (Informational) Haley Hedstrom, Executive Director

Beehler questioned how the ownership works for the zoo building. Director Filby Williams stated that the City has a 10 year agreement with the Zoological Society which details responsibilities for routine maintenance and capital improvements. Stated that the Zoological Society is solely responsible for all capital improvements except where the City Council allocates funding. Stated that the City's primary funding source for projects like this is the tourism tax fund. Stated that the City is committed to exploring other avenues for funding this project outside of direct City funding.

Beehler questioned if the parking lot is a part of the project. Hedstrom stated that the parking lot is a part of the proposed improvements. Stated the improvements would improve safety and flow. Stated that the parking lot improvements are included in the total cost estimate.

Beehler questioned how far into the future will this building last. Hedstrom stated that it is projected through the end of their long-range plan, which goes through 2037.

Beehler questioned if portions of the zoo will be closed or if animals would need to be moved during construction. Lizzy Larson, Director of Animal Management & Facilities, stated that the plan is to close portions of the building, but not the whole building. Stated that they are being intentional about what animals they are bringing in and planning ahead for this project.

Olson questioned if there are other communities that this project is based on. Hedstrom stated that the plan was based on the current program at the Lake Superior Zoo and the current needs. Stated that the AZA accreditation holds them to a higher standard. Stated that they will continue to look at other zoos for examples of elements they can bring in.

Olson questioned if the proposed education facilities will be sufficient for the needs of the community. Hedstrom stated that the proposed improvement will almost double the educational space that currently exists. Stated that there will be other spaces within the building that will have multiple uses, including education space.

Olson questioned what the annual maintenance will look like with the new facility. Larson stated that the maintenance is expected to be about the same. Stated that the new building will be larger, but the current building is old and has structural issues.

Lovejoy questioned if there will be a dedicated medical space in the new design. Larson stated that there will be dedicated space to attend to a minor injury. Stated that the main building will remain a hub for guest experience.



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Lovejoy questioned if there are first aid kits throughout the zoo. Larson stated that they are spread throughout the zoo, and staff driving around in carts have first aid kits with them.

Beehler questioned if the city is responsible for the maintenance. Director Filby Williams stated that it is a collaborative effort. Stated that routine maintenance is the responsibility of the Zoological Society, and the City is responsible for periodic, non-routine maintenance.

LaPorte questioned how admission is tracked, including where visitors are coming from. Hedstrom stated that zip codes are tracked through admissions, both at the door and memberships. Larson stated that one growth factor in tourism is the behind the scenes tours, which is largely adults and are not local.

C. Park Point Recreation Area Plan (Informational) Katie Bennett, Senior Parks Planner

Olson questioned how community input has influenced the plan goals. Bennett stated that the original goals were framed around a grant application. Stated that the community input received so far has aligned with original goals but expanded upon. Stated that the goals within the Essential Spaces plan were heavily community informed.

Olson questioned if any of the project partners have been involved with other park plans. Director Filby Williams stated that LHB was a part of the design team for the Brighton Beach project. Stated that it is standard practice to conduct a full RFP process when hiring design firms for park projects. Stated that LHB was selected out of a number of applicants. Bennett stated that the City has worked with LHB in the past for other projects as well.

Olson questioned if there will be consideration for prioritization of improvements in this plan, providing options for different levels of funding available. Bennett stated that this will be a part of the planning process and community engagement.

Beehler questioned what the existing data reveal about the current use of this space. Bennett stated that we have rental data for the Park Point Beach House and the pavilions, as well as for larger special events. Stated that New History is collecting historical data patterns as well through a variety of resources available.

V. Commission Committees

Administrative (E-Board) meeting date: Thursday, August 7 at noon, Parks Conference Room - David Demmer, Kala Pedersen, Josie LaPorte [Jessica Peterson, Bridget Erickson]

Special E-Board meeting date: Thursday, July 17 at 2:00 p.m., Parks Conference Room.

VI. Commissioner & Liaison Reports

VII. New Business

VIII. Old Business

IX. Division Report

Assistant Manager Watts highlighted the Park Point Beach House management and operation agreement and also highlighted the Park Point Boardwalk project.



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X. Public Comment

XI. Adjournment

Meeting adjourned at 6:48 pm.

XII. Next Meeting

The next meeting will be Wednesday, August 13 at 5:00 p.m., Council Chambers.