

PARKS AND RECREATION COMMISSION
MEETING MINUTES
Friday, November 5, 2021

Members present: Dorothy Dybvig, Dave Barsness, Tony Vavricka, David Chasson, John Gaede

Members absent: Karry White, Oliver Dykstra; Council Liaison Pete Spartz

Staff Present: Administrator Kathy George, Streets & Parks Supervisor Craig Hiler

Other: Bill Penning, MN Land Trust; Jen Yocum, *Pine County Courier*

Call to Order

The meeting was called to order at 8:30 a.m. by Chair Dybvig.

Approve Agenda

Motion Barsness, second Chasson, to approve the Agenda as presented. Motion passed 5-0.

Approve Meeting Minutes

Motion Gaede, second Barsness, to approve the minutes from the October 15, 2021 meeting. Motion passed 5-0.

New Business

Bill Penning – MN Land Trust – The Park Commission has been considering selling or donating an easement over the KREEC property to the MN Land Trust to preserve the property into perpetuity. After initial consideration to sell a conservation easement, it has been discovered that the MN Land Trust will not purchase an easement over property that is already owned by a public entity (i.e., the City). Penning stated that what the Land Trust could do if the City were willing to donate the easement is cover all of the transactional costs (survey, Phase 1 environmental assessment, habitat management plan, staff time, etc.).

Penning attended via Zoom Videoconferencing. He explained that the MN Land Trust is a 501(c)(3) organization. If the easement were donated by the City, the easement area would perpetually be protected. The easement cannot be removed or changed – ever. The City would still own the property and the terms of the easement can be negotiated – it doesn't have to cover the entire parcel. Penning stated that the City may want to leave out the parking lot and picnic shelter area. By granting the easement, the City would no longer have the right to make improvements.

Penning stated that the Kettle River is a “high value amenity” and that Skunk Creek is gorgeous. Those, along with an unnamed stream, provide ecological benefits and protect nearby high-quality areas. The property could be managed to become “outstanding” quality.

Commissioner Chasson noted that there currently is no grand master plan for the property – just the parking area and some pavilions/shelters. The Commission is also working on signage. Penning suggested setting aside areas for future development and also look at the trail system. These things need to be thought about ahead of time because the easement, once in place, cannot be changed. The resulting habitat management plan can be changed over time.

Penning stated that the first step is for a draft terms sheet to be generated and sent to the City for reaction and input. Negotiations would then begin regarding the terms of the easement. Penning stated that he will be leaving the MN Land Trust by the end of the year and Wayne Osley will handle communications until another person is assigned.

Commissioners wondered if the approximately 200' of desired trail through currently-owned DNR property could be added to the easement. Penning stated that he has experience working with Hennepin & Cook Counties, but it didn't appear that he has worked with the DNR on a similar project.

Commissioners thanked Penning for attending the meeting and noted that they would like more time to consider the Land Trust idea. Later in the meeting, Commissioner Chasson asked for feedback. Commissioners stated support for preserving the property, but have concerns about restricting future improvements and connections. Some felt it would be better to come up with an overall plan first, before considering the Land Trust. A loop trail system was suggested. Mountain bike trails were mentioned; however, Commissioner Chasson stated that he is not in favor of this use due to the soil conditions and habitat. Commissioners asked for any existing maps of the area to get a better visual for planning purposes.

LHB Proposal – Phase 1(a) Robinson Park Project – The Phase 1(a) project includes new bathrooms, a picnic shelter & plaza area. The State grant contract has now been fully executed, which means the planning work can begin. The grant project allows \$32,500 for design/engineering/construction admin services. LHB has submitted a proposal for a total of \$34,200.

Motion Dybvig, second Gaede to ask LHB to present a proposal that is in line with the grant project budget. Motion passed 5-0.

Continuing Business/Updates

Mary Thorvig Memorial Tree Garden – The Commission reviewed a design for the entrance arch that was provided by John Bishop, FCI, after he received feedback from the Commission. The main design change was to have “Mary Thorvig” along the top of the arch and “Memorial Tree Garden” underneath. Commissioners were supportive of the revised design. Bishop will be asked to move forward with the project.

Robinson Park

Camping – there were 12 registrations for 15 days of camping in October.

Grave / Memorial Marker – Jim Larson reported to staff that he found a marker that was placed in Robinson Park in the early-1900's. The story goes that a little girl fell out of a boat and drowned in the Kettle River and the marker was placed in her memory. The marker as it is today is not believed to be associated with any remains – it has moved over the years. On Friday, October 29th, Larson, Lee Dybvig and Administrator George went out looking for it. It was located on the southern end of Robinson Park where the ground is very “boggy”. Since then, Dybvig has retrieved the marker and it is now stored at the

Street Shop. Pictures were taken and will be shared with the archeology team that is working on the Cultural Landscape Report. Research will be done and perhaps the marker can be placed securely in the park with signage, or perhaps it can be donated to the Sandstone History & Art Center.

Fall Clean Up – Commissioner Barsness coordinated a fall clean up effort that took place on Saturday, October 30th, with members of the MN Climbers Association. Dead trees were cut down and Barsness plans to retrieve them and split them for fire wood, which he will provide for the campsites. He would like to do more cutting, especially along the road into the park. But the road will have to be blocked while the trees are being cut. He will coordinate with S&P Supervisor Hiler on the details.

Legacy Grant Planning Process – Commissioners met with Heidi Bringman on November 2nd to review the proposed layout for the Phase 1 Robinson Park project. Bringman has set up a zoom meeting for every two weeks – Tuesdays at 10:00 a.m. for all who would like to participate. Commissioners reviewed the revised concept plan.

Stream Restoration Support Letter – DNR – In following up with the DNR about the 2019 letter the City sent to the DNR asking to be placed on the Stream Restoration List, Restoration Coordinator Amanda Hillman spoke with Administrator George and has reached out to Dam Safety, Parks and Trails, and the Area Hydrologist to discuss the City’s safety concerns. She stated that she will meet with these entities on Friday to get whatever answers she can. It was determined that the Stream Restoration process is mainly concerned with fish passage, which is not an issue at the dam site. Commissioners noted that perhaps the next step is to reach out to our elected officials for assistance.

Skunk Creek Trail – Signage – Carole Bersin is working with Commissioner Chasson on the design for Skunk Creek Trail signs. Commissioners reviewed the latest design and noted that they would prefer a positive message; such as, “Enjoy Trails for Hiking and Skiing”. Chasson will relay the feedback.

Other

Mayor Pete Spartz will serve as the Park Commission Liaison, as Councilor Val Palmer has scheduling conflicts.

Adjourn

Motion Barsness, second Vavricka, to adjourn at 9:55 a.m. Motion passed 5-0.

Respectfully submitted,
Kathy George, City Administrator