



"A Growing Community"

BAXTER PARKS AND TRAILS COMMISSION MINUTES

Monday, February 24, 2025 at 4:00 PM

Baxter City Hall, 13190 Memorywood Drive, Baxter, MN

CALL TO ORDER

The regular meeting of the Baxter Parks and Trails Commission was called to order at 4:00 pm by Chair Barrack.

ROLL CALL

MEMBERS PRESENT: Chair Melissa Barrick, Commissioners Mari Holderness, Todd Calhoun, Josh Pennington and Council Liaison Patrick Sundberg

MEMBERS ABSENT: Commissioner Mitchell Scott

STAFF PRESENT: CD Director Josh Doty, Planner Matthew Gindele, Public Works Director Trevor Walter, City Administrator Bradley Chapulis

OTHERS: Chris Armitage

MINUTES

1. Approve Parks and Trails Commission Minutes from August 26, 2024

MOTION by Commissioner Calhoun, seconded by Commissioner Holderness to approve the Parks and Trails Minutes from August 26, 2024. Motion carried unanimously.

COMMENTS AND QUESTIONS

None

OLD BUSINESS

None

NEW BUSINESS

2. Park Improvements Funding Discussion

Chair Barrack asked for the staff report. CD Director Doty gave the background of city staff requesting a City Council discussion regarding park improvements and related funding. In the last two years, the city identified parks projects for construction/completion. City staff has completed design work on the larger projects that require design (including the Dog Park, Loren Thompson hockey rink, Whipple Beach ADA access, and the Southdale park playground). The cost estimates to complete the larger projects have come in with considerably higher costs than expected, which has created the need for a park improvements funding discussion with the City Council.

CD Director Doty reviewed the park improvements and associated fees with each project listed on the table which was in the packet. He indicated that if the city completed all of the projects with high

end options, the Park Dedication Fund would be at a negative \$1,365,627.00. The second chart showed completing all the projects but with low end options, which still have a negative \$582,427.00. This created a need to receive general direction from the City Council.

CD Director Doty stated that the Council in 2025 would like to see Southdale Park playground and the base dog park option. However, there is still a deficit with just those two projects. The Council encouraged these two projects but had sticker shock at the price of the dog park. Therefore, the Council has asked the Parks and Trails Commission to review the dog park to see if there are ways to reduce the cost of the dog park.

There was conversation regarding donations with City Council and a need for a donation policy in the future.

Commissioner Pennington asked if the Southdale CAMP study was needed if the playground equipment and bathroom are the only infrastructure. CD Director Doty indicated that it wasn't just the buildings, it was also fields, parking lot, irrigation and anything that would be included as an asset to the park. Public Works Director Trevor Walter added that this CAMP will take place after the new playground equipment is installed and the life span of the play equipment will also be noted in the CAMP.

City Administrator Chapulis stated that because Whipple Beach is a regional park located within the City, he is working to try to have the Crow Wing County forgive the land payments at Whipple Beach. If the County agrees, the City would have more funds to complete the CAMP.

CD Director Doty stated that the City also never knows how much funding will come in from Development. However, if funding does come in, then maybe items such as the CAMP could be added back in for that reason as well. Public Works Director Trevor Walter indicated that if additional funding came in, other projects such as the Whipple Beach Master Plan could also potentially start in November or December. He noted that Whiskey Creek Bridge was on hold until next year and LT Park rink is also on hold and noted it would be a 2026 project if funding is available.

Commissioner Holderness asked if there was any future revenue coming into the park dedication fund. CD Director Doty answered that at this time of year, there are lots of potential projects, but it is hard to predict. Some projects come forward and some go away, some start conversations with staff and then wait a year or more to come forward, and others come in and do not need to pay park dedication because the property they are developing either has park dedication credits that were paid in the past or are not required to plat and therefore are not required to pay park dedication. There is no guarantee of what will move forward. He noted that the good thing is that development is strong in the City.

City Administrator Brad Chapulis asked how quickly the fund is replenished and if park credits are mostly used up now so that that won't be limiting the amount of dedication coming in with new projects. CD Director Doty informed the Commission that it typically takes about 5 years to build up 1 million in Park Dedication. He stated that the past practice of paying park credits on property is no longer being done in the city and most of the land that had credits is developed now. He used an example of a 73-unit apartment building that was recently approved that is being developed on land that had 70 park dedication credits that were paid in the early-mid 2000s; instead of getting \$1,800.00 per residential unit on all 73 units, the city will only get park fees on 3 of the units since there were 70 credits on the property that were previously paid. CD Director Doty informed the Commission of the land dedication option with the Commission, he noted that staff doesn't see many of those requests.

CD Director Doty stated the City Council also had conversations regarding what constitutes a new improvement (that would be eligible for park dedication funding) and what is maintenance and not eligible for park dedication funding. He used the example of the LT Hockey Rink in that keeping a dirt court area and replacing wood boards for wood boards could be considered maintenance but that is very different than the highest amenity project option with a new sport court added in the middle of the rink for summer park use. So, what is new vs. maintenance will receive more discussion in the future.

Chair Barrick asked if the Council discussed if they want a minimum amount to remain in the Park Dedication Fund. CD Director Doty indicated that they didn't get any feedback on that. Staff took away from the conversation that they can't be in the negative. Commissioner Pennington stated during those years that there wasn't any funding was when the Commission put on paper what they would like to see when the money did come in. He added that he too had sticker shock at the price of the dog park, however the Council and this Commission have it on the priority list.

Chair Barrick stated that she would like more information on funding. She said that she had been led to believe that there was a lot more money in the park dedication account. If the Commission knew ahead of time on the funding, then the Commission could be more efficient with planning projects. CD Director noted that it was a fair point and noted. He did add that everyone at the staff level was shocked at the prices that were coming in for hockey rink boards, dog park prices, and the Whipple ADA project. The land payments were not considered at the time the account was looked at, which is significant. Chair Barrick does not want to see engineering done on a project that is not going to move forward, she wanted to make sure the City gets money back. CD Director Doty said that is also a fair point, which is why staff raised the issue of maintenance vs. new construction.

3. Approve Playset Replacement at Southdale Park

CD Director Doty introduced Chris Armitage of St. Croix Recreation and noted that they have helped the City with pavilions and playground equipment. Mr. Armitage gave his company history of working within Minnesota and Wisconsin. He then started reviewing the playground equipment with the Commission. He explained the overview and most people ask, "why isn't there more equipment on the overhead view". Mr. Armitage indicated the two reasons are funding and safety. He then explained the use zones that extend out around the play equipment; he stated that those use zones can't overlap with other play equipment due to safety concerns. Option number one use zone is kind of full in that design. He stated the two designs includes equipment for two age ranges: 2-5 year olds, and 5-12 year olds. He talked about how the playground was designed with the equipment for the younger age groups on the perimeter of the playground so the small kids aren't as likely to run through the play area for the bigger kids where they could get hurt more easily.

Mr. Armitage reviewed Option 1 with the Commission. Reviewing each piece of equipment including the 360-loop slide, which helps with ADA accessibility. The Rally Round Climber was explained next and then the Eight Person Spinner, he noted the spinners are limited in speed. The Single Spin Swinger was explained, there was also a 2/5 Area composite structure that has a climbing wall, slides, tunnel and pod climbers. He moved on to the swing sets noting that they are always close to the sidewalk for ease of use. He then described the different climbers and how the sizes differ. Mr. Armitage asked for any questions after his first presentation.

CD Director Doty asked Mr. Armitage to explain the 360 play and how it lays out and makes a circle amongst the main structure. Mr. Armitage, using the power point to explain to the Commission how the children can continually play by jumping to different areas.

Mr. Armitage then reviewed Option 2 with the Commission. Showing a larger composite structure and remodel of the 8-person spinner. He noted the different slides, the Big Dual slide, Luge and Viper slide. He then spoke of the Aro spinner and Kid Force spinner, ADA approved. Using the presentation to show all of the different features of the equipment.

Mr. Armitage reviewed the difference between the two different options with the Commission. He stated the budget for the playground equipment is \$146,400.00, Option 1 is \$142,150.00 and Option 2 is \$143,662.00, both under budget. Mr. Armitage explained the items included in the price are installation, blown in wood fiber, demo and prep and delivery.

Mr. Armitage informed the Commission that the spinners are the easiest to switch out from Option 1 and Option 2 if desired. He explained the size difference and cost difference between the options with the Commission. He asked for questions or comments from the Commission.

Commissioner Holderness stated she likes the Aro Spinner from option 2. Mr. Armitage agreed that he also likes the Aro Spinner even though it is a little more costly (roughly \$500.00 more than the other spinner). CD Director Doty confirmed that changing spinners and composite structures on both options would still be under budget.

Commissioner Pennington asked if the swing set was also included due to aging/safety of the swings. CD Director Doty indicated it was for both of those reasons and it's best to start with all new equipment. Mr. Armitage also added that the current swing set is almost over a sidewalk making it a little bit out of the use zone and would have to be removed with the new equipment, therefore, new is better. He explained the use of swing sets and how much space is required. Trevor Walter stated that those swings are slightly into the sidewalk and not a good scenario. He stated that in the past the use zones were smaller for swings, maybe only 1.5 times the height of the swing rather than 2 times the height like it is today. Mr. Armitage noted that the rocks would be relocated for the new equipment. Chair Barrick asked about the existing benches, picnic tables, water fountain etc., how it associate with the design. Mr. Armitage stated those items are outside of the playground area and therefore, outside his scope of work and won't change.

Chair Barrick asked the Commission if there was a preference between the options. Commissioner Holderness liked Option 1 with the Aro Spinner. Commissioner Pennington and Chair Barrick liked Option 2 as it is similar to the existing equipment and they've heard feedback that the OK equipment was different and too much change. It was noted that there were no twist slides in the other parks, they are all straight slides. CD Director Doty stated that both options bring in a few new items, such as the twist in the slides. There was discussion on the sizes and height of the slides.

Commissioner Pennington asked if there is knowledge of the age group using the parks. He has been there when soccer was going on and the place was packed with kids of a certain age, which options are gauged for that age group. Mr. Armitage stated that both options are similar in age and user capacity. He stated Option 1 capacity is 129 and Option 2 is 131 and the equipment is for ages 2-5 and 5-12 years of age. It was noted most of the equipment in both options were in the 5-12 age group. CD Director Doty noted that the pod would be for the little kids and the bars for older, that seems to be the difference.

CD Director Doty stated he felt that Option 1 was more for the older kids and Option 2 was for younger kids, but just slightly. Commissioner Holderness agreed that she likes Option 1 as kids love to have spinning things. Mr. Armitage agreed that most of their playgrounds typically have a spinner. Chair Barrick asked the Commission if they agreed on Option 1 and change out the 2-5 or the other smaller spinner for the Aro Spinner. Commissioner Holderness and Calhoun agreed. Chair Barrick asked CD Director Doty if he would like a motion. He indicated that would be great and then staff could get moving on ordering and get the equipment installed prior to the summer.

Commissioner Pennington asked if there were color options. He would like to see the equipment reflect the Brainerd school colors as it is near the soccer fields. CD Director Doty stated that is a new idea. When the play equipment in LT and OK were updated the City agreed on a color scheme of green, maroon, and brown; this would be a change from that. Mr. Armitage stated that they can make the playground equipment any color desired, however keeping the colors the same as the colors in other Baxter parks helps identify it as a Baxter park verses a school affiliation. Public Works Director Trevor Walter mentioned that a few years ago the City of Brainerd went to all the same colors to know you were in a Brainerd Park, keeping away from possible affiliation with the school and Baxter did the same, picked colors that neither of the other entities use. It was not just the playground equipment, it was roofing/siding materials as well. It was noted that Community Ed and a private soccer association use the fields almost 100% of the time, not the school.

MOTION by Commissioner Holderness, seconded by Commissioner Calhoun to recommend approval of the Option 1 with the Aro Spinner for replacement playground at Southdale Park. Motion unanimously approved.

4. Baxter Dog Park Review

CD Director Doty stated on February 4, 2025; City staff requested direction from the City Council regarding funding of parks improvements. The City Council provided direction that the City should plan for construction of the Baxter Dog Park in 2025, but the commission should look at options to cut costs from base project cost estimate of \$457,400. Specifically, the City Council questioned whether water needs to be extended into the center area of the park or if cost savings could occur by having the fountain near the parking lot along Clearwater Road. The City Council also questioned if constructing a permanent restroom structure is needed. The Council encouraged the Parks Commission to spend time evaluating the Dog Park plans to provide a recommendation on what the baseline Dog Park Construction project would include for 2025.

CD Director Doty reviewed the park location, design, amenities, surrounding area and trails on an aerial site plan within the packet. He noted that the City Council suggested a port-a-potty rather than a permanent restroom to save \$65,000.00 and save on the signage by going to a metal sign for a fraction of the cost. The dog play equipment was also questioned by staff, if it was needed in Phase 1. Those three items would save \$94,000.00. CD Director Doty noted that moving the water fountain closer to the parking lot would also save money. Chair Barrick asked if the dogs would muck up the grass and just turn the whole place into mud. Trevor Walter stated that irrigation is needed in the play area to keep the grass thick and healthy. CD Director Doty added that staff had several conversations about ground coverage. Staff thought about leaving it sandy and then heard from dog owners that sand is the worst option. Turf was the best solution, but also the most expensive, while wood chips and rocks you have to worry about the dogs eating them. Ultimately it came back to grass and irrigation will assist with maintaining the park. He noted that there are a grove of pine trees in the south play area, that may not have grass, just the pine needles. Commissioner Pennington noted that if there are dogs out there digging, irrigation is not going to help. He noted

that he has been to several dog parks and the high use areas have no grass at the entrance, only further into the park had grass. Public Works Director Trevor Walter stated that he, the Parks Supervisor Alex Hondle, and Josh Doty visited a number of dog parks during the initial planning process and noticed that the high traffic volume areas in the dog parks where grass was worn through were primarily at the entrance into the play area and around the perimeter of the fence. He stated that turf or additional concert could be added later if wear and mud become a problem.

Chair Barrick stated that in order to cut costs she thinks that the port-o-potty should be installed rather than the permanent bathroom, the play equipment is an option for fundraising in the future after input is received on what kind of play equipment is desired, and the sign should be switched with the one that is less expensive. She mentioned the memorial kiosk was brought up by a Council member and that could also be a donation item. Chair Barrick responded by saying this is a very expensive dog park and she would like to see the cost lowered to have money for other items; Commission Calhoun agreed. Commissioner Pennington asked if digging in water and sewer was adding a lot of cost to the project. Trevor Walter stated that water main line should be installed and stubbed of under the port-a-potty like it was in Jewelwood Park. This would preserve the ability to construct a permanent bathroom in the future in the location of the port-a-potty without having to tear up the driveway and parking lot. CD Director Doty noted that if they didn't run water and sewer there would be a saving. Trevor Walter stated that they could also save on dewatering if they waited until mid-late August to put the water lines in when the water table is at its lowest. Commissioner Pennington asked about dewatering costs. (Trevor explained the costs associated with dewatering.

Commissioner Pennington asked if the wood chip trail is included in Phase 1? Staff responded that the trail is already roughed in. Commissioner Pennington stated that he is not a fan of wood trip trails and would rather see what the Arboretum has or an aggerate trail instead of wood chips. Public Works Director Walter said he will be looking at what was done for surfacing at Babinski's to see if there is a better alternative than wood chips. Commissioner Pennington noted that wood chips get spongy and are hard to push a stroller on if you are walking your dog with your child. CD Director Doty stated that they have had complaints in the past about wood chip trails. Chair Barrick liked the natural trails that are down at Mississippi Overlook Park, Commissioner Pennington agreed, those are also at the Arboretum.

CD Director Doty stated that if a motion is made this will move forward to City Council with the three amendments. Chair Barrick recapped the potential motion as switching out the permanent bathroom for a port-a-potty, switching out the proposed sign for a much less expensive metal sign, and removal of the dog play equipment until the City can assess what play equipment is desired from the community. These changes to the plan would reduce the total cost by approximately \$94,000.00.

MOTION by Commissioner Calhoun, seconded by Commissioner Pennington to recommend approval of the dog park design improvements but switching out the permanent bathroom for a port-a-potty, switching out the proposed sign for a much less expensive metal sign, and removal of the dog play equipment. Motion unanimously approved.

Trevor Walter stated that if the design is approved by the City Council on March 4, 2025, then staff can finalize the design documents and forward them to the Council at the first meeting in April to approve the plans and specs and to authorize bidding. The Commission responded that they didn't need to be present for bid opening. Commissioner Pennington stated only if the bids come in high and they need to cut another item.

UPDATES

None

ADJOURN

MOTION by Commissioner Holderness, seconded by Commissioner Calhoun to adjourn the meeting at 5:53 p.m. Motion unanimously approved.

Approved by:

Submitted By:

Mellissa Barrick
Chair

Shanna Newman
CD Administrative Assistant