



Park & Recreation Commission Meeting
City Hall, 3989 Central Ave NE
December 3, 2025

MINUTES

Call to Order/Roll Call

Andrew Macko called the meeting to order at 6:02 pm

Members present: Michael Deneen, Teresa Eisenbise, Andrew Macko, Avery Metzger, Andrea Ostergard

Staff present: David Cullen, Public Works Director; Keith Windschitl, Recreation Director; Deanna Saefke, Recreation Secretary; Connie Buesgens, Council Liaison; Aaron Chirpich, City Manager

MISSION STATEMENT

The mission of the Columbia Heights Parks & Recreation Commission is to foster a healthy, inclusive community by providing a diverse park system and recreational opportunities that enhance the quality of life for people of all ages while fostering sustainability and environmental stewardship for future generations.

Community Forum

None at this time.

Consent Agenda

Eisenbise asked for the JPM budget on page 29 regarding the maintenance and construction materials, the budget line doesn't look like it's spent very much. Windschitl replied there hasn't been a lot of construction because the City Manager had asked for a pause in major renovations inside Murzyn Hall due to the unknown status of the future of the building. The one item that has been brought to the city council is to replace the carpet throughout the entire building for next year. The quote came in just over \$25,000 for both upstairs and downstairs, stairwells, bar, main hall, and senior center. Basically, we haven't done any construction or improvements other than what needs to be repaired. Eisenbise asked if this budget item will get saved or rolled over into the next year. Windschitl replied that it doesn't really roll over. The line item will still be there to see what is done with the building. We do not want to make a lot of repairs and then the building gets redone or is torn down. Eisenbise replied that seeing a small amount not used and then walking through the building it is easy to say that a sink could've been replaced or something like that. Windschitl replied that there have been items like the water heater for the dishwasher in the kitchen that was replaced this year.

Motion by Deneen, second by Metzger, to approve the consent agenda. Upon vote: All ayes. **Motion Carried.**

Letters and Requests

A letter of request was added from the Buy Nothing Project & HeightsNEXT to waive the rental fee for the use of Murzyn Hall on December 14th from 3:30-8pm for a community-centered gift-exchange and sustainability event. This non-profit focuses on sustainability, community-building, reducing waste and building meaningful connections among neighbors. Deneen indicated they normally do this type of event at First Lutheran Church. Ostergard replied the Buy Nothing Project will host an event wherever they can at a school or anywhere they can have space. The woman writing the letter has done this for awhile and the group is in and out with no problems. Buesgens indicated they had searched at other locations and were running out of options. Ostergard indicated Murzyn Hall would be very appropriate for this event. Saefke indicated on this requested date there is another group renting the facility so there will be tables and chairs already out for the group to use. Bilyeu-Anderson wanted to find a date prior to the holidays on the weekends. Saefke offered rental options for weekday evenings, and the senior center downstairs which has more availability. Since they wanted to use the larger area Bilyeu-Anderson approached HeightsNEXT to work together on the reservation. Windschitl indicated the history of Murzyn Hall reservations is to not waive fees on weekend events and try to structure fee waived groups when there are already events in the facility and staff are scheduled. For example, if this Buy nothing

group were to use the Senior Center while the group is upstairs, the other group is already paying for the custodian, the heat, and the lights, it would be of no cost to the Buy Nothing Group. To cover these operational costs there is a nonprofit rate of a \$70 facility fee and then \$30 per hour of facility use. HeightsNEXT is also given this rate for events held outside of regular business hours or when there are no other groups in the building. He indicated the option was given to Bilyeu-Anderson for free time in the facility. The city shouldn't be expected to take on the burden of the costs for these events even though it is a good event and benefits the community. Deneen asked if the Cheers For Beers event pays \$70 and \$30 per hour. Windschitl replied yes it is treated at a regular rental with a nonprofit rental rate. Macko clarified on Sunday, December 14th the Train Collectors group is going to be in the hall prior to the requested time, and that would generally be the end of the custodial shift. The Buy Nothing Group wants to add on to the end of that time and would extend the shift for the custodian and energy usage for the facility. Saefke replied, correct.

Macko agrees with being consistent across the board with nonprofit groups, and there have been other community groups given the same rate. Ostergaard feels that other events have had the fee waived on the weekend, like Co-Hi Con. Saefke replied the event wagon or park rental has been waived but not typically a Murzyn Hall rental. She indicated the Commission could choose to waive the \$70 facility fee and keep the \$30 per hour just to give an additional break since they are using the tables set up the same way they will be for the prior group. Macko replied that it would be \$105 dollars for 3.5 hours they are requesting. Windschitl replied that waving the \$70 facility fee is reasonable since we are not bringing in a custodian just for their event. The \$30 fee mainly covers the custodian hourly costs. Eisenbise asked if hooking up with HeightsNEXT is a way for the event to be under a nonprofit group. Ostergaard replied that the Buy Nothing Project isn't an actual organized nonprofit group. Windschitl indicated the HeightsNEXT group would have insurance coverage as well and is just working together with the organizer of this event. Members discussed the type of event, if any have attended it, and it is a good event. Ostergaard feels the spirit of the event during this holiday season is important and from that perspective asked if HeightsNEXT would be willing to cover the rental fee and if not it seems like a small amount to ask for. Buesgens is a member of HeightsNEXT and replied that Bilyeu-Anderson would not be able to afford the fee and that HeightsNEXT is not in a position to cover it. She asked if the Senior Center is open that day. Windschitl replied yes it is open while the other group is upstairs in the main hall. He stated the custodian is going to cost more than \$30 per hour. Buesgens replied the Buy Nothing event could happen at the same time as the Train Collector group. Windschitl asked if the free rate during the timeframe of the upstairs group was offered to Bilyeu-Anderson. Saefke replied yes. Often times when people are planning events like this various options are discussed, then the person continues planning on their own, discusses the event with other people, and in this case she spoke to Buesgens, when the date was confirmed it was with Buesgens and it wasn't verified that Bilyeu-Anderson understood the fee structure. Ostergaard asked if there are enough large tables in the lower level. Windschitl replied yes the Senior Center, M/M Room, the Edgemoor Room could have tables in it, and it would be important to tell people to go to the lower level back entrance. Ostergaard replied that it feels a little weird for the city to say no we can't do this because no one can come up with \$100 when the spirit of it is well intended. Deneen stated, is the city in a position to eat the costs, right. Windschitl stated that if this would have been planned further in advance the Buy Nothing group could have asked the CH Athletic Boosters or Lions Club for a donation to cover the rental fee. He stated the offer could still be presented for using the building prior to 3pm at no cost and any time after 3pm the \$30 hourly fee. Macko agrees with using the facility free while another group is using the hall is the best financial situation although having the event in the lower level might not be what they ideally want to use. There is ample parking for both events on that day. Asking for \$30 per hour to offset facility costs is well within reason. Eisenbise agrees that in the spirit of cities mission being equitable and sustainable it feels like a small price of \$100 but yet understands we need to be able to keep the lights on and be fair across all groups using the facility.

Metzgar asked if his company Rock Solid sponsored the event if that would be ok. Macko replied yes. Buesgens told Metzgar to bring signage for the event to promote his company and that they have done that at other HeightsNEXT events for sponsors.

Motion by Ostergaard, second by Eisenbise, for the Buy Nothing Project and HeightsNEXT to use John P Murzyn Hall on December 14th, to waive the \$70 facility fee and approve a reduced rental rate of \$30 per hour which will be covered by Rock Solid as a sponsorship. Upon vote: All ayes. **Motion Carried.**

Old Business

Sullivan Lake Park

Chirpich reported feedback is in from the open house at Sullivan Park and the online survey which closed towards the end of October. This feedback is being compiled to form concept plans. Some of the main points were concerns with play areas close to the lake, proximity to the parking lot, and other points that drifted the focus away from the A block, and into the B and C blocks for play amenities. Keeping in mind that the play structures need to be 150 feet away from the fitness court, the consulting team is creating concept plans wrapping around B & C for those amenities. There is also a stormwater collaboration coming into focus that might need to utilize some of the A area for a regional stormwater amenity with MNDOT and MWMO. Buffers can be placed between the play structures and housing. Updated concepts will be available soon.

Ostergaard stated hearing from a lot of the townhome residents that were concerned with a playground being next to their property and they seemed to soften after discussions were made for the structure to be more nature themed and not a loud bright color. Chirpich replied that idea was another goalpost in the feedback that nature themed was preferred. That also ties in nicely to a regional stormwater amenity that plays off the naturalistic features. The watershed wants you to be engaged with the area as well. ISG also has concepts to address the bathroom facilities with a more natural enclosure. Chirpich indicated there is grant money for parts of this project that will need to be done in 2026. The stormwater management piece will need to come into better focus before other decisions can be finalized. Ostergaard asked if other possible amenities will be eliminated because of the stormwater use in the A block. Chirpich replied no, there is a lot of room in park and the current concept shows blocks A, B, and C being delineated by the pathways that can be moved.

Buesgens added with the stormwater project that MNDOT discovered a huge pipe that comes across Central Avenue from the east and it feeds water from 260 acres that equals 61% of the water going into Sullivan Lake. It is thought that this storm drain brings a huge plume of garbage and sediment into the lake after heavy rains. Due to this MWMO is planning to set aside money in their capital improvement program and that would make a huge difference in the quality of the lake. Chirpich indicated a feasibility study is underway to work with stormwater enhancements in this area. Ostergaard asked how the redevelopment of the Medtronic site fits into this. Chirpich replied the development will have its own requirements to do stormwater improvements on their site, but the whole idea is that we want to go beyond what is required. That is why we want to merge with MWMO and work with MNDOT. MNDOT has some big goals to reduce pollutants from what they contribute to the watershed; phosphorous being one of the biggest. The park improvements are merging with all of that and there are a lot of moving parts.

Cullen reviewed the research summary from ISG who did the public engagement for Sullivan Lake Park. The preferred location in that survey was the C block for play amenities. Some of the reasons for this location are having a proximity to parking, better visibility and safety. Some of the amenities were ranked on importance such as shaded areas, picnic tables, water fountains, and other features. Poured-in-place play surfacing was preferred. Play equipment features were ranked in order of importance; climbing structures, slides, swings, sensory play features, and others. A naturalistic theme for the style of the play structure is preferred.

Ostergaard asked what a typical response rate is because 170 survey results seem small to her. Buesgens replied statistically if you get a 10% reply that is considered a successful survey. Cullen indicated the consultant stated this is a higher rate of responses than they typically see in similar surveys for a city our size. Public feedback is difficult to get and that is why these things are pushed at every event. It helps to have a group like this commission to help push the surveys

out to others. Saefke replied this was also sent to a targeted area and we weren't asking people who live around Huset Park to answer questions on Sullivan Lake Park.

Cullen reported that we are waiting on some designs to come forward. It is great to see possibilities of playground and park amenities and how the various types of options that are available. Staff are hoping to present design options in January. Deneen saw comments regarding the fitness court on the survey comments and asked if there is any data on the usage of that structure. Cullen replied there are QR codes on the fitness side on how to use the various pieces and it is tracked on how often the code is scanned. He has not seen data on that but will look for that information. Ostergaard replied that some of the activities instruct the user to start on the ground and that will not happen in the winter months. Cullen stated he frequently stops by the park during the week and always sees one or two people there. Sometimes they are using the fitness equipment and other times they have been looking at it. He even brought his family there on the weekend and that day there were multiple people using it. When this structure was installed it was later in the year, and now with winter the usage will go down, but with amenities like this it is a momentum type of thing. As more people use it the word will spread and usage will increase. Ostergaard thinks it will be smart to offer clear programming in the spring to get people started because it is kind of a learning curve on how to use it. That might increase momentum of people using it. Buesgens asked if there is an app for the fitness court and if people could review it at home. Ostergaard replied yes. It has a timer for each workout and various levels showing you how to use each piece in more than one manner. It is a pretty robust program. Buesgens stated it would be good to have a video on our website showing someone using it. This would be a project that the communications department could film and put on the site. She knows that there have been outdoor fitness classes at Huset Park in the past and is that something that could be implemented at Sullivan. Saefke replied there may be certain parameters regarding charging fees for classes and she asked Rottler to look into that part of the grant. Ostergaard asked if Zumba classes could be offered for a donation as payment. Saefke replied anyone could plan to meet there for an activity, she was not part of the grant process and is unsure of the requirements for planned activities when it comes to charging a fee to participate. There was a post on Facebook that someone was advertising for a yoga paddleboard class on Silver Lake and they would meet at Silver Lake Beach. So people use public places for structured activities that are private classes. Cullen shared that staff from Public Works take part in a biggest loser weight loss challenge and plan to use the fitness court at Sullivan Lake Park twice a week. He welcomes anyone to join them. Ostergaard thinks that minimum coordination inspires people to meet regularly and builds community. She believes a push from the City in the spring will really help participation. Buesgens indicated other staff at the schools or other businesses might be inspired to use the facility. Macko reminded the group that during the open house it was stated that no one uses the fitness court and there were two people using it during the meeting.

Soccer Field Master Planning

Cullen recapped the discussion from the previous commission meeting regarding placement of a soccer field at Huset Park. Staff looked at survey responses for a potential soccer field on Huset East. If a soccer field were to go into this location it would only be one field, the road would not be moved or Jefferson Park building taken down. When Cullen and Chirpich walked the location they realized quickly that there were unaccounted items that would cost a lot of money to address. There is a thirty-three inch storm drain in the middle of the field that drains in the middle of the current location where a field was suggested. That storm drain collects all the water from the neighborhood to the east and would need to drain into the storm water pond indicated at Huset Parkway and Jefferson Street. This would need to be larger for this and would cost more. The parking lot on the east side of Huset East Park is on a high elevation and is not big enough. The proposed lot would require a lot of grading and have less parking spaces than what is currently there. Parking can already be an issue on the weekends and we want to avoid overflow into the neighborhood as much as possible on the dead end street. To reroute the stormwater system it would mean going through or under existing structures like the basketball court with no immediate means to replace them and we do not want to take away amenities from the public. It was decided that this was not the best area for placement of a field.

Staff are now looking at the west side of Huset Park for potential soccer field placement. The fenced field is highly used in the city. The field closer to the block garage does get some use. The field closest to Murzyn Hall may be an abandoned field. The field near Jefferson Street has a little more use. If there were only two fields staff believes that would be enough for this area. Eliminating the two fields on the west side near the Murzyn Hall parking lot brings the cost down drastically because the ground is fairly level. There is already water subbed into this area and power. There is ample parking. There is a potential down the road to use Zurek Pond on the far west side of the park to irrigate the fields. Public engagement will still take place, but staff are thinking that the west side is a better option for a soccer field.

Ostergaard asked if you could still have two programs happening at the same time, like a t-Ball and soccer game. Windschitl indicated it depends on the scenario. You could still run a t-ball or coach pitch baseball league on field 4 near Jefferson Street and have a soccer game at the same time. You could also have a game in field 3 with the fence and soccer at the same time. Without having the park fully planned or renovated it feels that we are throwing things in where they fit, it could be good or a potential problem for future development. Ostergaard replied without a full future plan and there are unused fields it is a way to get a soccer field. Windschitl indicated as discussed in the previous meeting recreation programs do utilize field 2 in the southwest corner but could get by using field 4 and other parks that have t-ball fields. Currently you can see there was a full-size field lined in the outfield of all four of the ballfields and Immaculate Conception School is the only one that schedules programs there. Macko replied there are a lot of good perks on this side of the park as opposed to the east side. The idea of future irrigation through Zurek Pond is amazing. Ostergaard asked where spectators would sit or would there be bleachers. Cullen replied that was mentioned to WSB the consultant for this project and they said that soccer is not typically a bleacher watched event. People bring their own chairs and blankets. Windschitl added there will be a nice view from the embankment alongside the parking lot and the hillside to the north. Cullen indicated it is a short walk for participants from parking spaces. Macko likes the fact that there are multiple parking locations. Deneen asked what other types of amenities would be part of it, like lighting. Cullen replied there will be substantial earth work done, electrical for lights, and even if the project couldn't afford field lighting they would still run conduit during that initial construction phase. This field is on top of a water supply line. It also has storm water systems and drains. Having that infrastructure already there is a huge benefit. Windschitl asked if WSB did a study comparing turf versus irrigating grass. Cullen replied they will do that research after the location is determined. Windschitl replied one of the biggest problems currently is Immaculate school is the only one using that full-size soccer field on the east side; the recreation programs and Strikers soccer uses the fields on the east side, but the field gets a lot of wear and tear in the fall. That is why he suggests a turf field. Deneen agrees that the turf gets torn up really easily. Cullen replied those questions will be answered in future reports. Buesgens added soccer fields prefer to be in a north-south orientation due to the sun.

New Business

Recreation Rental Rates for 2026 & John P Murzyn Hall 2027.

Windschitl reported this is done annually to set rates for the upcoming year or two. The rental rates for John P Murzyn Hall in 2026 were already established and for the most part the majority of Saturdays are booked. The attached rates are a recommendation and open for discussion. Staff suggest a 5% increase. There are a few things that should be noted; residents of Columbia Heights get a 25% discount off of the rental fee, Saturdays for the most part in 2026 are already rented, Fridays and Sundays not so much, and they were not as busy last year. In previous years they were rented very often but there was a significantly lower rental rate at that time. One other thing that could be considered is to leave the rental rate the same as in 2026 for Fridays and Sundays in 2027 and increasing the Saturday rental rate for 2027. Staff also suggest increasing the hourly rate for the security officer from \$35 to \$40. Ostergaard clarified that it was voted in the last year or two to increase the rate by 3% or something. Macko recalls increasing the rates slightly. Windschitl replied there have been different amounts over the years, some years it wasn't increased at all. One of our greatest amenities is that we allow people to bring in their own food or hire their choice of a caterer. We do not pay to advertise our facility and still rent out most Saturdays in a year. Deneen verified that for alcohol service renters are required to use the Columbia Heights Lions Club. Windschitl replied yes. Ostergaard asked what are the rentals on Sundays.

Windschitl replied they are mostly nonprofit groups but also some private events. Ostergaard asked for the nonprofit groups like Midwest Polka, they are charged the discounted rate. Windschitl replied yes. Saefke indicated there are graduation events on Sundays, and often times if a Saturday is booked a family planning a quinceanera will choose a Sunday over a Friday. During the most popular months, April through October it is approximately half of the Fridays and Sundays that are booked. Ostergaard indicated that it would be a selling point to have a discount on a Friday or Sunday. Saefke replied that when the major increase occurred a few years ago, it felt like we were more inline with other facilities. It should also be kept in mind for the future of the facility in regards to this being more of a traditional community center or a revenue making venue. Windschitl indicated one of the points he continues to tell the city council is that we are always booking two years at a time so if there are major improvements for the building they need to be discussed now. All of our air handling units are way beyond their life expectancy and if they stop working in the middle of the summer, we will have rentals each week that need to be taken care of. The other part of the discussion is whether we want to continue to be in the rental business. The facility used to be more of a community hall for Columbia Heights residents and now we are getting renters from all over the metro area. That is also good for the community. The city council is going to really have to look at what they want to do with the facility in the future. Do we need a catering kitchen when most people bring food in that just needs to be warmed or reheated. With one of the architects' plans for redoing the building, one idea was to make the kitchen the air handling room. Currently the air handling units are up in the attic and that presents a whole issue of problems. There are a lot of things that need to be discussed and who knows when the best time is. Obviously the public works facility is an issue right now. Ostergaard asked if the city council is discussing the future of Murzyn Hall. Buesgens replied the focus is on the public works facility because that could be a heavy load for our taxpayers if the state doesn't help with funding. Murzyn Hall is going to be millions of dollars depending on what the community wants to see. It could easily be another five years of more before that facility is discussed. Deneen indicated the State is anticipating massive shortfalls in their biannual budget. Buesgens indicated that is why there is discussions to upgrade some things that we can in the meantime, like replacing the carpet. If the building were to be torn down in five to ten years or more, it wouldn't be a big cost that is lost. The city hall building took four years from the start of planning to when it was completed. Eisenbise stated that is why she was asking about current budgets to be used for facility improvements like a bathroom that could be updated now and utilized for the next five, ten, fifteen years.

Deneen asked what the plan is for the old city hall. Buesgens replied that it will eventually be torn down. It may be utilized during construction of the new public works building when that occurs. Deneen asked what kind of events were prior issues at Murzyn Hall. Windschitl replied it was more the last minute rentals looking for a cheap rate that didn't want to follow through with the requirements and rules for their event. Buesgens asked if there was overcrowding. Windschitl replied most of the groups weren't destructive, but with larger group sizes there is a lot of wear and tear on the facility. Deneen was making sure it wasn't the wrestling events causing problems. Windschitl replied no and honestly when he first heard those things were happening he thought that there was going to be issues with the wood floor and we haven't had problems with those events. Saefke commented that the capacity was lowered a few years ago. The top capacity was 375 for a long time and prior to her working at the city there were floor diagrams for 500 people. Just having a rental every Friday, Saturday, Sunday for May through August created wear and tear on the aging facility, wore staff out and created other issues. Once we dropped the capacity and raised the rental rates, everything came together and the events are running a lot smoother. Windschitl stated there was a time were a lot of issues were happening with quinceaneras and gangs were crashing the parties, there were weapons, and other problems. We made adjustments in regard to the alcohol service with the Lions Club and even had a time when the renters would give each guest a bracelet, so it was known who was invited to the party. The current birthday parties have been a lot better, and our renters come back to us for multiple events and refer their families.

Deneen asked what the average revenue is for Murzyn Hall rentals. Windschitl indicated he would need to check but the average is around \$90,000 per year. That really doesn't cover all the costs within the building but that is difficult to compare because some of the space is back charged to other departments throughout Murzyn Hall. So, all the other

budgets are compensating the facility costs as well. Ostergaard thinks it is an important building for the community and we do not have other options, so we definitely need to keep it going. Is there a way to shave the rental fee for Fridays and Sundays to increase the rental revenue. Macko stated that Ostergaard is suggesting that by dropping the amount it costing to rent, it would increase the number of people that choose to rent. Ostergaard replied they might choose to rent a Friday or Sunday at our location instead of going somewhere else. Macko agrees that it is a solid option to increase Saturdays but keep the rate the same from 2026 to 2027 on a Friday or Sunday. Windschitl thinks that worked in previous years. Ostergaard asked about the Senior Center or LaBelle Lounge rentals. Windschitl replied the LaBelle Lounge is only available for rent 30 days out because it is part of the full Murzyn Hall rental. Ostergaard asked if people are renting those spaces out. Windschitl replied yes and it is typically a 7 hour rental time.

Eisenbise asked about the rental rate for nonprofit groups if it is still available. Saefke replied that is typically not on the rental brochure but is offered to groups who qualify. In previous year there was limited availability to these types of groups. Some of it depends on the pleasure of each Commission on how much they want to open the calendar to nonprofit rentals. If rental rates are discounted for Fridays and Sundays you may increase rentals and not have as much availability for nonprofit groups. Windschitl indicated there is a slightly higher hourly rate for groups that are not based in Columbia Heights.

Motion by Eisenbise, second by Deneen, for the 2027 rental rate of John P Murzyn Hall to remain the same rate as in 2026 for Sunday through Friday rentals, Saturday rental rates will increase by 5%. The hourly rate for a security officer will increase from \$35 to \$40 per hour. Upon vote: All ayes. **Motion Carried.**

Park Rental Fees

Windschitl indicated the current policy is that we do not rent outdoor shelters at the parks and only rent the park buildings. This is because we can guarantee that the buildings will be clean for each renter when they arrive. There are so many users of the parks each day that we cannot promise a shelter would be in good condition, we do not want to charge people for an unclean shelter. The four rentable park buildings are Keyes, McKenna, Ramsdell, and Huset Park East. The current rental rates are \$75 for a resident, \$175 for a nonresident, and for a resident with a large group of people over 100 people is \$150. The proposed rental rates for 2026 are \$100 for a resident, \$200 for a nonresident, and for a resident with a large group of people over 100 people is \$175.

Macko asked if staff have received a lot of kickback on the rates or problems at the parks. Windschitl replied no not really. Saefke indicated there were 35 park rentals for a total of \$3000 in 2025. Huset Park East was rented 15 times, Keyes Park was 5 times, McKenna Park was 2, and Ramsdell Park was 13 times. Macko stated this \$25 increase is in line with the cost of living and making sure staff are getting paid for the work being done.

Windschitl stated the current fee for the Event Wagon rental is \$75 currently and staff are recommending an increase to \$100. This is a trailer with 12 tables and approximately 60 metal folding chairs, plus various outdoor game items. The rumor is that the event wagon service will be on hold for 2026. The main reason for this is staffing because Windschitl is retiring in January and he is the one who delivers the wagon. Public Works doesn't think that they will have staff who can handle this. The city manager indicated this will still be available for city events. This has been a great amenity for the citizens, so he anticipates some kickback if it is not available. Deneen asked if there is a lack of city vehicles with hitches and that is the problem. Windschitl replied that all of the vehicles have hitches. Saefke replied that public works staff had concerns with who would be able to drive it and correctly handle parking it in some of the places that Windschitl has delivered it in the past. Windschitl replied he has a lot of experience with large trailers. He suggests that if the event wagon becomes available that it is told to residents it has to be parked on the street and will not be backed into private spaces. Saefke indicated it has been suggested to pause the event wagon rentals for 2026 until staffing is figured out. Recreation staff will track the number of calls that are received. She reported the event wagon stays within the city boundaries. It was rented thirteen times by residents for a total of \$975 and it was used fourteen times for city

functions. Ostergaard assumed that it was only allowed to be parked on the city streets. To have thirteen residents used the wagon doesn't feel like that many times so it feels like taking away an amenity for people. Saefke indicated that staff are proposing that when or if the event wagon becomes in service, that the rental rate will be \$100.

Windschitl stated the ballfield rental fee is \$75 per day or \$20 per hour and that rate still seems fair for what we provide. There are additional fees if a group wanted the fields dragged or other services like that.

Windschitl reported the Garden Plots on Reservoir Boulevard have 48 plots, each one is ten by fifteen feet. We do meet the need of the community with this amenity. The plots are full every year but yet there isn't a wait list every year for new people. The fee will remain the same at \$35 per plot. Eisenbise asked how it is favored for people to get a plot automatically. Windschitl replied the gardeners have a deadline that they need to pay for their same plot from last year. Eisenbise said so it doesn't reset every year, but is concerned with new people wanting to get one and it is full. Saefke replied that there has only been one or two people on a waitlist in the past few years. Windschitl indicated that staff sometimes know that a plot will no longer be used and we will try to get that new person into the space. There is a planned timeline for returning gardeners, dates for new residents to get an opportunity for available plots, and then it opens to any nonresident or a current gardener wanting an additional plot. Staff provides tilling, mowing, staking out the plots, and the water supply. Ostergaard replied they are always looking for help at the Lomianki garden. Buesgens replied there are not private garden plots, but yes people are always welcome to help. Ostergaard stated there are ten raised garden plots at Valley View Elementary that are always looking for help.

Ostergaard recommends that city staff try to make the event wagon available and if the policy changes to have it remain parked on the street. She feels it is taking away an amenity to residents. Macko agrees it is safer to leave it on the street and not want to damage someone's personal property during a delivery. Commission members agree. Windschitl indicated that there still needs to be communication with residents on getting the key and leaving it locked in the wagon when finished using it. Renters can pick up the key at the Recreation office. She stated that Windschitl has done great customer service and the wagon can still be available even if the customer service changes slightly.

Motion by Eisenbise, second by Deneen, to increase the park building rental fee by \$25 for 2026, \$100 for a resident, \$200 for a nonresident, and for a resident with a large group of people over 100 people is \$175, the Event Wagon will currently be paused but if and when it is available the rental fee will be \$100, the ballfield rental will stay the same rate, and garden plot fee will stay at \$35. Upon vote: All ayes. **Motion Carried.**

Reports

A. Recreation Director

Windschitl reported he met with a Tibetan group who play cricket and would like the city to consider installing a pad or turf area at Huset Park so they can continue to play. This year they had a tournament with four teams, and we just happened to see them playing at the time. There are residents and nonresidents who like to use Huset Park.

Windschitl indicated he is retiring in January. He was going to inform the commission last month, but we didn't have a quorum to hold a meeting. He gave his notice to City Manager Chirpich in October, so he had time to get things moving on a replacement. Saefke indicated his last day will be January 21st after 28 years of service with Columbia Heights.

Macko congratulated him on his service and retirement.

B. Public Works Director

Cullen was called away on an emergency call.

C. Commission Members

Eisenbise asked if Huset and McKenna Parks will have ice rinks this year. Windschitl replied that the areas have been plowed but have not been flooded yet. Saefke indicated there will be ice rinks at Huset Park East, McKenna Park, and Ostrander Park.

Saefke indicated the annual Snow Blast event will be on Saturday February 7th. She will be Interim Recreation Director until the position is filled.

Motion by Ostergaard, second by Deneen, to adjourn the meeting. Upon vote: All ayes. **Motion Carried.**

Macko adjourned the meeting at 7:50 pm.
Deanna Saefke, Recreation Secretary