



Park & Recreation Commission Minutes of the Meeting June 24, 2020

Tom Greenhalgh called the meeting to order at 5:35 p.m.

Roll Call

Members present: Sean Clerkin, Tom Greenhalgh, Becky Groseth, Rachel James, Marsha Stroik
Staff present: Kevin Hansen, Public Works Director; Keith Windschitl, Recreation Director; Deanna Saefke, Commission Secretary; John Murzyn, Council Representative

Introduction of new members Becky Groseth and Rachel James.

Election of Chair and Vice Chair

Motion by Clerkin, Second by Stroik. Greenhalgh elected to Chair. Clerkin elected to Vice Chair. Upon vote: All ayes. **Motion Carried.**

Approval Consent Agenda

Motion by Clerkin, second by James, to approve the consent agenda with amendment of Event Wagon pricing to the December minutes. Upon vote: All ayes. **Motion Carried.**

Letters and Requests

A. Letter of request from the parents of the Columbia Heights Class of 2020 asking for a reduced or waived fee for the use of the Event Wagon and Huset East Park.

Stroik asked what date this event going to take place. Windschitl replied Wednesday July 15. He indicated that there are not any other activities or programs in the park that evening. Staff feels this is a good group to make the exception for regarding waiving the rental fees. Clerkin indicated this is a onetime exception to waive the fee considering the current situation in regards to how the students ended the school year. Windschitl stated there are a number of parents within this graduation class that have volunteered as coaches in the past for the recreation programs. Stroik suggested having the CH Athletic Boosters pay for the rental fees. Windschitl replied that group is already making donations for other items with this event. Stroik is concerned with the timeliness of this event and the group size. Windschitl replied the group will need to follow the guidelines of the State. Staff has created a COVID waiver for park rentals.

Motion by Clerkin, second by Groseth, to waive the rental fees for the use of Huset Park East and Event Wagon for the CHHS Class of 2020 with the signing of the COVID Park Waiver. Upon vote: All ayes. **Motion Carried.**

B. Request from the MN West Coast Swing Dance Club for a reduced fee of the nonresident nonprofit rate for Murzyn Hall on December 11, 2020. They have many members who are also part of the Midwest Polka Association and members that live in Columbia Heights.

Saefke indicated the MN West Coast Swing Dance Club used to rent twice a year and had a member who lived in the city. The group has not rented for a few years but has since that time become a nonprofit group. They have member who belong to both the Midwest Polka Association and this group; and members that live in the city. Since the Midwest Polka Assoc. is receiving the resident nonprofit rate they are requesting the same rental rate

of \$25 per hour instead of \$50 per hour. Clerkin asked when the last time they rented. Saefke replied approximately 4 years ago. However the polka group is trying to host dances more often but have been canceled due to Covid. Windschitl explained the history of creating the \$25 resident rate for groups operating within the city and the \$50 nonresident rate to cover facility costs. Clerkin suggested for next year that the Polka Association also pays the \$50 per hour if they want to rent. Windschitl indicated the difference between the two hourly rates is \$150 for a 6 hour rental. For each rental regardless of the group there is a lot of staff time for the setup and cleanup. He feels that at \$50 per hour the group is receiving a very good discounted rate and a regular renter would pay more than double that fee. James agrees with the staff recommendations.

Motion by Stroik, second by Clerkin, to offer the rental fee of the non-resident non-profit rate \$60 entry and \$50 per hour of use in Murzyn Hall. Upon vote: All ayes. **Motion Carried.**

Old Business

A. Park Facilities Inventory – Draft CIP (Capital Improvement Plan)

Hansen reviewed the Parks CIP update completed in 2018 and reported that based on 2019 dollars it would cost 7 million to complete renovations to all of the parks. Staff is having a goal setting session with the City Council next week and will be able to discuss the options for park improvements. Staff will discuss options to redevelop each park one at a time or to complete all parks with funding through options such as bonding. Hansen stated that interest rates are at the lowest they have ever been. The downside is at the current time the effects of the COVID-19 pandemic are unknown and bonding for Park Improvements may result in a tax increase. Stroik asked if bonding could move forward without going to a public vote. Hansen replied that decision is the City Council's, but yes. The City Council could elect to have a referendum for the sale of bonds for Park Improvements or not. Clerkin would prefer to have the public vote. Hansen reminded the Commission that if the decision was made to have a referendum there would need to be an additional \$50,000 - \$100,000 for the process itself. Clerkin replied during a recent survey the one thing people were willing to spend money on was the improvement of the park system in the city. James stated the requests for park improvements, replacing playground equipment, and other items are very modest and reasonable. The 7 million would be spread out over many years. Hansen indicated the survey that Clerkin referred to was in 2004 or 2005 with many different questions, but the one item with positive feedback from the citizens indicated they would support an increase in taxes if the park system was rebuilt or updated. Over 60% of the responses were in favor of that as long as all of the parks were updated. Ultimately it is up to the decision of the City Council on how they want to budget the funding.

Stroik asked if it would be possible to ask the city council about bonding for the amount needed for park improvements, and to get a feel for where they are at. Hansen replied it is too soon in the process. The first step is to have a discussion with the city manager. There should be a discussion with city staff and the city council. Hansen indicated the city council has a lot of projects in front of them including the new city hall, the possibility of renovating John P. Murzyn Hall, the Public Works facility in need of major rehab or a new building, and other infrastructure that the council has been discussing. An argument can be made that a good park system is a critical component of why people choose to move to a city or choose to stay. General park usage has increased this year. James replied based on the conversations today, how parks are funded, and with the city being mostly developed, bonding makes the most sense to fund the redevelopment for the parks. Hansen stated infrastructure wise, bonds haven't been sold since 2013. There have been other types of bonding in terms of investment.

Hansen reported in the park development fund has budgeted for Wargo Court construction, but beyond that there are no other funds available. Stroik asked when that reconstruction will occur. Hansen replied in 2021 or 2022. Greenhalgh asked if the Wargo estate has approved the master plan. Hansen replied the family has not

reviewed or commented on the final plans as of yet.

B. Master Planning – Process

Hansen reported the City maintains fifteen parks. Parks are funded largely by residential redevelopment and park dedication fees. There is not a lot of redevelopment to sustain consistent funding. In the early 2000's staff began looking at the park redevelopment on a park by park basis. Prior to that there were no major park improvements since the 1970's. Redevelopment in each park is reviewed and a Park Master Plan is created from staff, Commission and public input. The plan is brought to the Park and Recreation Commission and then City Council for adoption. Funding is then obtained through grants and park dedication. Over the past twelve years six parks have been updated. Park updates can typically cost \$350,000-\$700,000.

New Business

None at this time.

Reports

A. Recreation Director

Windschitl reported due to COVID-19 a lot of adjustments have been made to programs and the biggest impact was on Murzyn Hall events. At the beginning of the shutdown rentals were refunded immediately. Currently rentals have either been refunded or moved their event to a later date through July. In regards to recreation programs the timing of the COVID-19 impacted many of the spring/summer sports programs. The numbers on baseball were minimal so that program never took off. Today is actually the first day that the governor approved games so the adult men's and co-ed softball program is running. There were a few teams that did not sign up because they have older team members and did not want to take a chance of getting sick with the pandemic. The summer youth park programs are running with adjusted participation numbers, social distancing practices, and increased cleaning precautions. The Wild Wednesday trips have been canceled either because the destination is not open yet or because of the decrease in numbers allowed for transportation. Windschitl reported the recreation department has teamed up with the Columbia Heights School District to provide free bag lunches for the summer park programs. The lunches will be dropped off at each program location instead of bringing the participants to Murzyn Hall like in the past. This is the same program the school district has been offering at various locations throughout the city since the stay at home order began. The youth Puppet Wagon program will be running. The performances are on Thursdays and Fridays with encouraged social distancing in the audience. Theater staff is offering the puppet show online as well through a YouTube Channel and a live feed on Facebook. The theater program will also be offering two plays this summer and has been a great program to have. We are lucky to have such talented instructors who have participated in our programs as youth. The girls' softball program began practicing a few weeks ago with teams in the 10U, 16U, and 18U levels. There will be some kind of games or scrimmages with local teams so the girls will receive some sort of competitive play. Senior citizen programs are running at much reduced participation. Some day trips are happening with a few people each trip. Delynn, the coordinator is doing a great job offering what we can.

Windschitl indicated there have been maintenance issues in Murzyn Hall. This is an old building and we just keep pushing through the problems that arise. For example the flashing came off on the back side of the building this week that Public Works staff came and nailed back up. The HVAC system was out for the past five days. This ended up being a programming issue and was repaired today. The refrigerator in the kitchen had the compressor go out; it is seven years old. A plumber was on site yesterday to replace faucets and repair leaks. The roof leaked this week just outside of the recreation office.

Stroik asked if the Hylander Center gym is open. Windschitl replied no, there isn't any way to separate people

and have control over people staying socially distanced. He will be doing some research on how to handle an open gym situation and speaking with the city manager on it. With the fitness room being so small there isn't ways to block off every other machine like they are doing at larger fitness gyms. Windschitl indicated if the center opens it will be further in the future, maybe closer to the fall or when the school opens.

Windschitl reminded the Commission the splash pad and wading pools are closed. The City Council decided to close the splash pad for the season because with other city pools and splash pads that are being closed there would be a significant cost increase to operate the splash with higher attendance numbers. There is not a way to monitor or restrict how many people are using the area at one time either.

B. Public Works Director/City Engineer

Hansen reported the seasonal positions are fully staffed. Typically there are thirteen to fifteen seasonals to help with parks maintenance and general maintenance. The boat landing at Silver Lake is being funded with a grant and the contractor plans to start July 17. The landing will be fully closed until October 10. Hansen reported with the increase usage of the parks there has been a large increase in garbage within the parks. Staff met with people from the Somalian groups to discuss educational resources while groups are using the park. One item that the group was interested in was education on recycling and having more containers in the park for recycling. Clerkin indicated that many Sunday evenings he will pick up trash around Huset Park. Hansen informed the new members that the city offers an Adopt-A-Park program.

C. Commission Members

Stroik asked what the status is for the new city hall and the old NE Bank building. Hansen replied the last real hurdle before the closing is to relocate the two cell towers that were on top of the building.

Greenhalgh adjourned the meeting at 6:30 pm.
Deanna Saefke, Recreation Secretary