



Park & Recreation Commission Minutes of the Meeting
John P. Murzyn Hall – Senior Center, 530 Mill Street NE
September 22, 2021 - 5:30 pm

Tom Greenhalgh called the meeting to order at 5:30 p.m. and read the opening statement for remote meetings due to a health pandemic and declared emergency. He reported that the meeting could be conducted by a combination of in-person and electronic means.

Roll Call

Members present: Sean Clerkin, Brian Clerkin, Tom Greenhalgh, Becky Groseth, Rachel James, Nicole Peterson
Staff present: Kevin Hansen, Public Works Director; Keith Windschitl, Recreation Director; Deanna Saefke, Commission Secretary; Connie Buesgens, Council Representative; David Cullen, Public Works Street/Park Superintendent; Liam Genter, Urban Forestry Specialist.

Approval Consent Agenda

Motion by S Clerkin, second by B Clerkin, to approve the consent agenda. Upon vote: All ayes. **Motion Carried.**

Letters and Requests

None at this time.

Old Business

A. Park Rental Rates – Update

Windschitl reported the City Council passed all of the park rental rates and policy changes as recommended by the Commission with the exception of the nonresident park rental rate. The Council felt the proposed \$100 rental fee was not enough to help cover some of the expenses for cleaning the park after such a large group. The Council proposed a rental fee of \$150 for nonresidents. Windschitl reported at the work session discussion that many times people who do not live in the city will find someone who does and have that resident rent the park.

Windschitl summarized all park rentals will be made in a four-hour block of time, all park rentals will end at 8 pm, and the fee for a nonresident will be \$150 with tax.

B. Fertilizer and Weed Control in City Parks.

Hansen reported this is a follow up from a discussion among the Commission from the June meeting. Members were asking for more information on the application of fertilizer and weed control in the City Parks. Hansen indicated the City Council and the Park & Recreation Commission has discussed this topic several years ago. Based on those discussions there are primary goals to treat the high use areas, namely the athletic fields and more intensely used park areas was to keep those areas relatively weed free. It wasn't a directive to keep the areas completely weed free. The objective is to control dandelions and other types of weeds. The parks department has been operating on those goals ever since. To accomplish that weed control the City uses TruGreen throughout the entire parks system at fifteen parks, no service is provided at three parks. Hansen introduced Liam Genter, City Forester and Natural Resource Specialist and David Cullen, Public Works Street/Park Superintendent.

Genter reported TruGreen provides applications at the fifteen parks two times per year. The applications include

fertilizer; a liquid based, mostly nitrogen, a little bit of potassium, no phosphorus, and is applied at the lowest recommended rates. The herbicide application includes a preemergent herbicide that targets crabgrass, and similar grass weeds, and a broadleaf herbicide that targets broadleaf weeds like thistle, dandelions, and other broadleaf weeds. No insecticides are applied including neonicotinoids. The application rates are always very dilute.

Hansen reported the Commission asked about the cost for the service. He indicated the cost can vary from year to year but is typically around \$15,000 annually on a contract. This is the most cost-effective way to get fertilizer applied and get broadleaf weed control applied. Hansen added Commission Member James previously asked about the TruGreen application at Sullivan Lake Park. Medtronic does their own applications around the walking trail area. The City does not go beyond the primary park area of the tennis courts, building area, and shelters, but not beyond that. If any application signs are seen around the walking trail that is done by Medtronic. They own the green open space just to the north of the park building.

James thanked staff for the detailed report. She read through it in careful detail and appreciates the City Forester, Genter being in attendance. James has no problem with the fertilizer and application around the ballfields. Her concern is with the application near the walking trails where people walk their animals and near the playgrounds where children are. Having dandelions in those areas do not impede on anyone's walking or playing. She understands the application is regarded as safe but many people still have allergies to the chemicals. Groseth would like to see a clarification on where the signs are being placed after the application so it is clear as to what areas have been treated and not just the entrance to the park. Cullen replied there isn't any statute that says they have to post signage after applications, so it is really up to TruGreen as to where they place signage. He will reach out to TruGreen and ask what their policy is. Groseth replied that might make people feel better to see signage around the ballfield if that is the area treated and not closer to the playgrounds if they have not been treated. Greenhalgh asked if the signs are dated and how long the signs stay out. Cullen replied the removal of the signs is typically up to the property owner. James stated the signs she sees do not have the date on them regularly. Hansen replied staff will ask TruGreen to write the date on the signs. He indicated that according to the TruGreen literature as soon as the liquid application is dry the area is safe to walk on. Parks staff can work on removing the signs in a timely manner.

Peterson asked what the goal is when applying the herbicides. Is the goal aesthetics, is it performance of the turf? Hansen replied a lot of the fields are multipurpose use fields and are really getting beat up. The only field with irrigation is at Ramsdell Park. A goal is to try and sustain as much turf for as long as we can on the fields. Windschitl replied this year is a perfect example when there wasn't a lot of rain. At Huset Park on the field used for soccer the grass has completely disappeared in the drought areas. As soon as there was rain this season the areas in front of Murzyn Hall where fertilizer is applied grew fast and greened up quickly. The areas in the soccer fields have little to no grass and the teams that play have been complaining about the conditions. The fertilizer sustains the turf conditions when there is not a lot of rain water. Without the rain the weeds are opportunists and take over. Windschitl indicated the ballfields are used for co-ed, men's, and youth leagues and we want to make the area look as nice as we can. Peterson asked if this process is the best use of money. If the field conditions are an ongoing battle to maintain it should be looked at to allocate funds for using a more robust seed mixture. She asked if the fields are over seeded. Hansen replied yes. An athletic seed mix is purchased for the fields. Peterson asked if it is over seeded every year. Cullen replied yes. Typically, parks are aerated in the fall, and then spec out or pick a specific seed to what the needs are in the area that was aerated. For example, along a boulevard there is a specific seed mixture that is tolerant of salt used on the roads in the winter. Peterson indicated the take away from this is that the conversation began because a citizen saw the signs at Sullivan Park, was concerned and posted on social media. She feels if the public is educated on the process and the

information is published it will ease peoples concerns. Hansen replied that is a great idea to publish information about the procedures. It will be beneficial if TruGreen will date the signs, and the signs are removed as soon as possible after applications.

Buesgens noticed in the past years a liquid spray was used on weeds along the sidewalk, and is wondering if that is still happening. Hansen replied yes that is done as need and most commonly along Central Avenue at the concrete medians. Buesgens has seen a torch used for weed control instead of chemicals. Cullen replied that application burns off the leaves and you do not always kill the root system below. Buesgens asked by using a spray application do the weeds come back in the same area. Cullen replied typically no, but yes weeds can reappear in that same area. Buesgens indicated the concern is when the herbicide is applied and it rains it will run off of the sidewalk, draining into the water system. Peterson replied the solution being used is very diluted. Spot application is the best practice. It is not her favorite procedure but if it is being done correctly it is reasonable.

Groseth indicated at a previous meeting the topic was brought up on updated the Tobacco Free Policy in the parks to include the whole park system and not just in the youth activity areas. Minneapolis changed their policy in 2017 making all parks tobacco and alcohol free. Why is the policy only effective during youth events? Peterson agrees with having tobacco free parks but wonders how that type of policy can be enforced. Groseth reported the City of Minneapolis policy indicated the first year was a grace period and after that year a person violating the policy could be asked to leave the park. S Clerkin replied he frequently visits Minneapolis Parks and the policies are not being enforced. Windschitl replied the enforcement of the policy was the biggest issue when the Commission was initiating the policy. The focus was given to the youth areas and where youth would be for games and practices, or even at the shelters. Some of the fields are also used for adult athletics and at that time some of the commission members had a problem with trying to stop an adult from using tobacco during an adult event. Secondly the question about enforcement was a big concern because if there isn't any enforcement who would abide by the rule. Saefke added there was a parent who said it is more comfortable for them to approach another adult using tobacco and ask them to leave the area when there is a sign indicating the ban during youth activities. Groseth brought up the policy of picking up after your dog and that there isn't a sign in the park where she frequents. S Clerkin stated the number of signs in the parks was reduced years ago. Hansen replied there is a backstory to that. Previous Commissions had reviewed the number of signs in the park and when there is sign proliferation people generally ignore the signs because there is too many. The Commission at that time choose to take down most of the signage in the parks. For areas of importance choose to do different things. One thing is to have availability of poop bags for pet owners. Instead of placing signage there is the opportunity to clean up after the animals. Groseth is okay with that as well and have ashtrays at the other end of the park. Hansen replied he has attended many meetings with discussions on smoking/nonsmoking issue and it is always a discussion on if there is any type of regulation, if it cannot be enforced do you really want to have the regulation in place. The City Council has had that dialogue over the years. Buesgens indicated if there is a no smoking sign in the parks maybe it would encourage more people not to smoke. Not every person might abide by it but it would give other people in the park some backup when asking another person not to smoke.

Greenhalgh asked if security cameras are being installed in the parks. S Clerkin replied additional lighting will be installed at the parks. Buesgens replied security cameras are being installed at Huset, Sullivan, and LaBelle Park to start. S Clerkin indicated brighter lighting will be more effective than cameras. Hansen the parking lot around Murzyn Hall is getting cameras. This was put together by the police department. The camera technology is much greater than even two years ago and they will be able to switch between day and night mode. The library is getting cameras next year. Hansen is not aware of LaBelle Park. The incandescent lighting at the parks is being changed to LED. It is a brighter and whiter light. S Clerkin asked if the outlets at the park shelters can be turned

off at a certain time. Hansen replied not currently. The breaker would need to be physically switched off. The usage of those park outlets is not costing much. S Clerkin replied increased lighting and the lack of outlets would deter people from being at the park after hours.

Peterson asked what was decided regarding the smoking policy. Greenhalgh replied the main thing is how to enforce it. Peterson stated she agrees with the other members that if there are leash laws posted and not being enforced, why can't there be a sign for a no smoking policy. It could still be a deterrent or a reminder. Groseth replied it might reduce the amount of smoking and garbage of cigarette butts on the ground. James feels the signage around the playground and shelter areas have been very effective. She has seen people smoking walk by the sign and then leave the area. S Clerkin asked if there is a primary park of concern for smoking. He suggesting trying to place a sign at that park to see if it helps the situation. Windschitl reported Medtronic does not allow smoking on their property. B Clerkin suggested trying a no smoking sign at Sullivan Park and see how it goes. Windschitl replied one other problem with the policy is that Murzyn Hall is located within Huset Park and there is smoking at almost every event from guests.

Motion by B Clerkin, second by Groseth, to use Sullivan Park as an experimental park of no smoking in the park.

James suggested setting a time period for the trial and revisit the results seen at the park. James suggested six months. Peterson suggested one year. Hansen suggested placing signage along the trail from 53rd all the way down to the existing primary park land that incorporates Medtronic. Rather than placing signage around the entire park. S Clerkin agrees with that suggestion. Windschitl indicated there are existing signs around the playground and shelter. Hansen replied these signs would just be along the trail. Buesgens knows of a resident that could monitor what they see for changes in the park. That person is at the park very frequently and had brought up this concern multiple times. Greenhalgh suggests revisiting the results in six months and finalizing the signage in one year.

Amendment: B Clerkin and Groseth approve the amendment to revisit the results after placing the signage at Sullivan Park trail in six months and finalize signage in one year.

Upon vote: All ayes. **Motion Carried.**

New Business

None at this time.

Reports

A. Recreation Director

Windschitl indicated there has been some questions on how to get an item on an agenda. At any time, a commission member can call or email Windschitl or Hansen to receive any background and history on a particular issue. Items can always be added to the agenda for discussion.

Windschitl reported Murzyn Hall has been very busy over the past year because of all the postponed events from 2020. Most weekends Friday, Saturday, and Sunday are booked. It has resulted in a lot of additional cleaning, upkeep, and a lot of mess. With that there has been issues with the HVAC system. It has been a costly summer with repairs.

Windschitl conveyed the youth summer program participation numbers were very good this year. The participation number were up from last year. We were very fortunate to have healthy participants and no

sicknesses go through the programs. We ran a few youth trips using a school bus and were unsure at the beginning of the summer if those types of trips would even be able to occur. The kids had fun and the trips were successful. The Senior Program has been running very well. Recently a group of senior citizens who play cribbage in New Brighton with many Columbia Heights residents, were displaced from their usual meeting place and are now meeting here. The adult softball leagues have been very good this spring and summer. An adult fall league for Co-Ed and Men's teams is currently underway.

Greenhalgh asked about the status of the Hylander Gym opening up. Windschitl replied it is still closed. He has had many discussions with the City Manager about it. Currently the gym is closed to the public because they feel it is too difficult to enforce the mask mandate all of the time with young adults during an open gym time. The school district has a mask mandate policy on school property. Currently there are a few select youth teams that are able to use the gym in a controlled environment where they are wearing a mask all of the time. The only exception is that the police department is running an open gym time for High School and Columbia Academy students. Windschitl indicated as soon as he is able to open the gym to the public he will.

B. Public Works Director/City Engineer

Hansen reported typically there are fourteen or fifteen seasonal workers and this year there were five or six seasonal staff. The parks staff usually runs with six employees and are currently at five. Recently staff had a nice discussion with the City Council regarding infrastructure. City parks were a part of that discussion. The parks capital improvement plan that the Commission helped to develop in 2018-2019 was part of that. On average there has been a 12-15% increase in building related costs due to COVID and the economy. The discussion will continue on the condition of the city parks and future improvements.

Buesgens added part of the discussion was hiring an architect to evaluate the condition of the John P Murzyn Hall facility; similar to what was done for city hall. Continuing with that progression the Park & Recreation Commission would be asked for involvement on changes to Murzyn Hall.

Greenhalgh asked how the solar panels are working that are on the city liquor store buildings. Hanen replied there are solar panels on two liquor stores, one public works building, public safety, and the library. There are five solar subscriptions and we have been operating off of one system. Two of the other systems came online today. This reduces the electric bills.

C. Commission Members

S Clerkin stated the Columbia Heights Lions Club is having a Halloween Bash on October 30. City Nights band will be playing for the event. The Lions Club is asking for the requirement of a security officer during the event be waived because there will be many of the Lions Club members present and controlling the event. Peterson asked how the liability is covered for the event. S Clerkin replied the Club has insurance. The event doors will open at 6 pm and band at 6:30 pm. The fee is \$10. There will be a \$1000 prize for the best costume.

Motion by Greenhalgh, second by James, to waive the requirement for a security officer during the event on October 30. Upon vote: All ayes, B Clerkin and S Clerkin abstain. **Motion Carried.**

Greenhalgh adjourned the meeting at 6:22 pm.
Deanna Saefke, Recreation Secretary