



**Park & Recreation Commission Minutes of the Meeting**  
**Huset Park West, 519 Mill Street NE**  
**September 25, 2024**

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**Call to Order/Roll Call**

Andrew Macko called the meeting to order at 6:01 pm

Members present: Teresa Eisenbise, Taher Harzallah, Andrew Macko, Avery Metzgar, Andrea Ostergaard, Brian Timm

Staff present: Kevin Hansen, Public Works Director; Keith Windschitl, Recreation Director; Deanna Saefke, Recreation Secretary; Connie Buesgens, Council Representative

**Community Forum**

None at this time.

**Consent Agenda**

Eisenbise asked on page 8 if the line item for Safeassure Safety Service is for the whole department or individual training. Hansen replied Safeassure is an independent safety consultant that the city uses. Public Works has their own safety committee that meets once a month and Safeassure attends approximately half of those meetings. They also provide public works specific trainings. Eisenbise asked about a line item on page 19 for repair and maintenance service because it only shows about 10% of the budget has been used. Windschitl replied that could be that there are some bills that haven't been put into that line item yet. It is also possible that the repairs made already are listed in another line item but still comes out of the same budget for maintenance.

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

**Letters and Requests**

None at this time.

**Old Business**

Hansen indicated at the previous meeting the Commission provided feedback on mission statements and gave key words they wanted to see in an updated statement. Staff put together five mission statements for review and would like feedback from the Commission. The first statement brings everything together, but it is the longest. This mentions recreation opportunities, diverse, cultural, inclusive of nature, sustainable, quality of life. The second statement is a different version looking more at future aspects. Statements 3, 4, and 5 are shorter. Hansen asked for input from the Commission to narrow down the options. Eisenbise replied she likes number 4 because it has the key words of healthy, environment, and diversity without being very long. Macko likes the enhance the quality of life for residents statement. With a statement like that you do not need to go into any depth. Hansen reported the Commission can vote on one statement and staff will take that and start drafting sections of the updated plan for future meetings. Ostergaard likes #4 but feels it is missing the piece around retaining greenspace. She likes the statement in #2 regarding sustainability and environmental stewardship. Hansen replied the statement from #2, enhance the quality of life to the line in #4 while fostering sustainability

and environmental stewardship for future generations. Macko and Eisenbise agreed. Hansen indicated the mission statement will read: The mission of the Columbia Heights Parks & Recreation Department 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. Commission Members agreed with that statement. Eisenbise thanked Hansen for working on the statement. Hansen replied he enjoyed the process and worked with other staff as well.

**Motion** by Timm, second by Metzgar, to accept mission statement; The mission of the Columbia Heights Parks & Recreation Department 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. Upon vote: All ayes. **Motion Carried.**

### **New Business**

Buesgens indicated it was nice to be back with the Park & Recreation Commission. Saefke stated Buesgens was the previous council liaison. She presented a book called "How to Turn a Place Around" which is focused on place making. The definition of place making is a philosophy and a practical process for transforming public spaces. It is centered on observing, listening to, and asking questions of the people who live, work, and play in a particular space in order to understand their needs and aspirations for that space and a community as a whole. Buesgens stated in basic terms you are not just creating a design; you're creating a place. The organization that wrote the book learned a few key lessons about the rule of money in creating public spaces. Small scale and inexpensive improvements can be more effective more so than a big project. They talk about developing the ability to effectively manage a space; so, when you are planning you also need to discuss managing and maintenance. For an example she explained how HeightsNEXT has created a food forest at Lomianki Park. There was an unused baseball field at that park. Six years ago, the group came up with the idea to plant food trees and bushes where people could come and pick for free. Last year Marquez Simula and others from the group decided to design a garden with pathways. Now this year it has become a place. There are places to sit, there is something to do, and there is something to eat. The garden has become active with people walking in the evenings, yoga practice in the mornings, a neighbor plays music, and you can see a lot more wildlife in the garden. The book talks about starting with little ideas and observations. She indicated there are little things the Commission can do to gather information before a consultant is hired. Commissioners can go to different parks around the city and watch. Are people using the facilities, are their additional activities happening, or is nothing going on. Then start documenting what they observe. Buesgens recently visited Sullivan Park and saw a couple under the pavilion eating lunch. She started talking to them and asked if they use the park often. They said it is their favorite spot to eat lunch because of the breeze and view of the lake. The third item from the book is the idea behind this concept, is spaces thrive when users have an arrange of reasons. Ten or more reasons will create a successful space. There are exercises and charts in the book. One idea Buesgens has is to have a chess in the park event with the chess club at the High School. After the event ask how people felt, do they see any changes, and would they like to do that again. During one event in the book, they tried the same event in three different places. Two of the events failed and one was successful. There are a lot of examples in the book of what other cities have done. Buesgens indicated the Commission can have subcommittees. The sustainability commission has two people that work on basic plants, one person writes a blurb for the newsletter on sustainability, another person has been looking for interns for projects. She stated it is okay for people to work outside of the meetings on things and bring information back to the meeting for discussion. Buesgens spoke to the City Manager and the city can purchase this book for commission members to read.

Buesgens shared a book on playground examples that she received at a recent national conference. She also shared field usage schedules regarding how the various ballfields are used for recreation programs. Windschitl

indicated the parks highlighted in these schedules are Prestemon, Huset 3 & 5, T-Ball fields at Huset near the garage, one at Keyes and McKenna, Keyes, Ramsdell, and Prestemon are also used for softball leagues. These schedules are primarily from spring and early summer. Ostergaard asked if there are times where you are unable to use multiple fields at the same time. For example, if soccer was happening you couldn't also have baseball or softball. Windschitl replied that is correct. For example, in Huset Park the outfield grass area is used for soccer fields, and it isn't really safe to have a softball game occurring where a ball could be hit into the soccer area.

## **Reports**

### **A. Recreation Director**

Windschitl reported the City Council approved the additional cost for Hylander Center gym maintenance. The city gym is maintained by the school district, and they invoice us for the services used. When the gym opened in approximately 2009 the school district has invoiced the city and the cost has not increased since 2012 in that maintenance. The district has now increased the service fee significantly to about \$20,000 annually. It is a difference from \$10,000 per quarter up to \$15,000 per quarter. This money is in the budget under other line items. Windschitl has worked with the district to negotiate other fees they were proposing to charge like inspection fees, to be waived or covered under the increase. This will also be increased for next year's budget.

Windschitl indicated some of the members asked about reviewing the budget before it is approved. He asked if the commission would like to see the budget line by line or just an overview if they are still interested. Ostergaard replied that she is interested. Even just for the recent example where an item didn't change for 12 years and there could be something that the members notice, there could be things that haven't be questioned in a while, or areas where the commission members could help push needs to the city council. She doesn't need a line-by-line review. Windschitl replied this is something that should start being reviewed mid-year. The 2025 budget was started back in March and the final budget is being proposed to the city council next week. Buesgens asked when staff have a better idea of what their line items will look like. Windschitl replied June, July is when staff see the final results from the previous year and have some idea of changes that might be needed. He suggests a review with the commission mid-year. Ostergaard replied that it should be thought of as the Commission Members being a support to staff and not that they are trying to inhibit any process. It would be nice to help refine things and offer feedback to staff. Windschitl replied in his career the city council has always been supportive of the Recreation Department and programs. He also keeps realistic expectations for the budget. This year a unique situation happened where we lost our grant funding for youth programs. This grant funded about \$70,000 for the summer programs. For next year's budget he eliminated a parttime coordinator position that had not been filled the last couple of years and utilized that money to cover the seasonal staff for the summer. So, the budget moved from one line to another.

Windschitl reported there are six teams for youth soccer this year. All the coaches are secured, and teams started playing. Youth basketball skills and soccer skills starts this week. Men's softball fall league is about halfway through their season. The summer Co-Ed and Men's leagues ended a few weeks ago. The Active Agers senior program has been doing a lot of different programming and trips. They are very busy and have a lot of participation.

Eisenbise asked if there was any feedback from the lack of park rentals. Windschitl replied there were very few issues this year and expected a few more with the amount of people that use the parks. He is only aware of one or two issues in the parks with the use of the shelters. As far as the overall revenue taken in for park rentals it will be down this year, but he is unsure of the current amount. There were a lot of building rentals this year, and some that were rented this year and typically were not rented in years past. He asked if anyone heard of any

other issues this year. The plan is to continue this same procedure for rentals of park buildings only in 2025. Buesgens asked how the cleanup of the shelters went without having reservations. Windschitl replied that it varies. There are a lot of responsible groups that clean but every Monday morning the parks crew is always cleaning the parks. Buesgens asked if there is any signage that could be posted to clean after use. Windschitl replied that years ago the Commission and staff agreed to not have too many signs posted in the parks. Hansen replied he will be discussing signs as well.

#### **B. Public Works Director**

Hansen reported the city council authorized the purchase of the fitness court for Sullivan Lark Park. Staff are in the process right now of making a minor amendment to the overall park plan. The plan will be brought back to the Commission for review and comment. The purpose for doing the amendment is to determine the best sighting for the fitness court. There are certain restrictions as to where it can be located, in relation to playground equipment. The fitness court will be installed in 2025.

Hansen indicated that staff have been taking an inventory of all the signage posted at the parks. There is inconsistent messaging. The police have been having some difficulties with enforcement of when the park closes. There are different closing times on signs at parks, but staff cannot find any ordinance or commission changes of when the parks close. Staff will remove the signs and make sure there is a consistent closing time so that it can be enforced. Past Commissions have had discussions on limiting the amount of signage at city parks. Sign proliferation is one thing we keep in mind.

Hansen stated there was a memorial dedication of another art piece here at Huset Park West this past Saturday. This is part of the cities Sister City, Lomianki in Poland where they have a mirror art piece for a memorial where a bomber went down during the war. There were between 150 and 200 people here at the dedication on Saturday. Harzallah asked about the electrical installation around the monument. Hansen replied that will be contracted out to have lighting on the monument.

Ostergaard reported the Commission voted at a previous meeting to change the park hours closing sign at Silver Lake Beach to be the same as all the city parks. Hansen replied that is when staff began looking at all the park signs for consistency. Ostergaard indicated there are Adopt A Park signs at some of the parks that are no longer valid and those should be removed or updated when looking at the other signs within the parks.

#### **C. Commission Members**

None at this time.

The Park and Recreation Commission and staff adjourned the meeting to walk around Huset Park West and discuss the history, current conditions and future plans.

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

Macko adjourned the meeting at 7:15 pm.  
Deanna Saefke, Recreation Secretary