



Park & Recreation Commission Meeting
City Hall, 3989 Central Ave NE
April 23, 2025

MINUTES

Call to Order/Roll Call

Andrew Macko called the meeting to order at 6:00 pm

Members present: Taher Herzallah, Andrew Macko, Avery Metzger, Priscilla Perez Umphress

Staff present: Kevin Hansen, Public Works Director; Keith Windschitl, Recreation Director; Deanna Saefke, Recreation; Secretary; Aaron Chirpich, City Manager; Connie Buesgens, Council Liaison; Will Rottler, Communications and Engagement Coordinator

Macko indicated that he took the oath of office prior to the start of the meeting. The election of officers would be postponed until the next meeting to allow for more members in attendance.

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.

Community Forum

A resident of Columbia Heights who did not give their name was in attendance. She indicated that she feels there is a problem with one person on the commission. She accused one member of having ties to Hamas and feels they should step down from the board. The resident indicated she was very upset and left the room.

Consent Agenda

Motion by Herzallah, second by Perez Umphress approve the consent agenda. Upon vote: All ayes. **Motion Carried.**

Letters and Requests

Old Business

Parks Passport Discussion.

Rottler presented a draft of the Parks Guide and Parks Passport. He reported that the communications department has updated the city branding and redesigned the welcome packet for residents. In light of that they made a parks guide to talk about the amenities within the city. The guide can be printed off, picked up at City Hall, the Recreation Department, and Library. There is a map listing various amenities at each park. There is other information regarding renting a park, events at specific parks, community garden plots, the county park, Silverwood Park, and Recreation Summer Park Programming. This will give new residents a resource filled with a lot of information. Rottler asked the commission what kind of format they want to see the parks passport printed in. Do they want an insert, or the last page could be a tear out page to turn in. The parks passport has questions to get people to visit the parks. How are prizes being handled. Rottler would refer back to the recreation staff to determine what that will be. He can come back to the meeting in May with any changes and the goal is to have hard copies ready to pass out at the Art & Info Fair in June. Staff would like to see the Parks Guide be more of a permanent resource that can be updated from year to year. Macko clarified the insert would be a loose piece of paper that would be separate from the guide. Rottler replied yes and people could also just pick up the passport sheet alone. Macko is a fan of having the amenities listed for each park. It gives people a resource when a specific park is busy they can see options. Rottler indicated that he will be working with the Recreation Director to update park photos over the next few weeks. Windschitl indicated the department receives a lot of calls regarding what is at each park for amenities, number of tables and other details at the parks. Having those photos on the website

will help answer those questions.

Rottler stated that regarding the questions on the passport, there were discussions on how you prove that someone visited the park. A QR code wouldn't be the best option because they want to encourage people of all ages to go to the parks. Questions asking what color or a number of a specific item is at a park. Macko asked at Silver Lake Beach Park regarding the question of when was it established, is there a plaque or sign there already. Rottler replied there is a plaque. The passport would be open from the Art & Info Fair until Truck or Treat. He would again refer to the Recreation Department as to if there is a prize for every submission and what kind of prizes will be given out. Herzallah asked what the prizes will be. Windschitl replied some of the ideas have been to give away some of the recreation t-shirts for old programs. Staff are still going to discuss options. Not knowing how many people are going to participate in this and there isn't a budget for prizes, so we are trying to come up with ideas. Rottler indicated to start there will be one hundred copies made. Herzallah asked how many winners will there be. Rottler replied there could be a grand prize drawing held after people turn in the passports in the fall. Windschitl indicated another idea for a prize is a gift certificate for a discounted or free recreation program. Buesgens stated a possibility would be to ask the owner of the Dairy Queen if there could be a free cone certificate given to participants. Perez Umphress asked if there is an age range, especially if there is a prize for participation.

Rottler asked if any members have changes to the questions or other comments regarding the passport. Staff want to have these printed by the beginning of June, so they are available for summer programs as well. Perez Umphress asked if the members or staff want to have a way to give feedback on the parks. Rottler indicated that staff discussed it and as a parks master plan is getting developed it would be up to the parks staff to determine how and when they want that feedback. When asking for comments like that there should be a way to let people know their opinions were received and a way to close the feedback discussion too. Macko likes having space for feedback. People are also welcome to attend a meeting to discuss ideas. Rottler replied that something could be added to the Parks Guide with a QR code for feedback or an email for the Commission. Buesgens asked if a QR code could be placed at each park that would direct people to one input for improvements and another for reporting a concern. Chirpich replied that is possible. Hansen replied there is a Report A Concern tab on the city website. That is how the parks department receives most of the concerns. Buesgens stated that most people have a phone on them, and it would be very convenient to scan the code in the moment and report a broken item. Rottler replied a permanent sticker, or sign would be better than a laminated sign. He indicated a QR code was placed at the Sullivan Lake Park tennis courts stating they are closed and to view more information regarding the project on the city website. Buesgens stated another link could be to submit photos while people are at the parks, that could be used in the future for other contests or social media posts. Rottler indicated that for the review at the May meeting, staff will add something on feedback and have the guide and passported printed in June. Windschitl asked if there is a space for people to write their contact information. This would be a way to get people on a list for future communications and a drawing for prizes. Rottler recapped this will be a foldout guide with an insert for the Parks Passport. That way if people just want the passport they can get that and keep the guide for future reference. Windschitl asked how many pages this will be and that he would like to see the contact information for Kordiak Park listed. Members are excited to have this project moving forward.

New Business

Medtronic Site Redevelopment: Review of current development plans.

Hansen reported there are two parts to this report, an update on the park and then because it is adjacent to Sullivan Park the update on the latest iteration for what is being proposed at the old Medtronic site. At the last work session with the city council the developer, Lincoln Avenue Communities, proposed a redevelopment project for the site. With the Comprehensive Plan update, there is guidance for what the city is looking for regarding the redevelopment of that 12 acre site. Starting at 53rd Street they are looking at getting a little bit of commercial properties in there but more residential units on the whole site. Commercial properties will be orientated towards 53rd for visibility and access. It is a combination of both rental property and owner occupied. There will be market rate apartments and affordable

apartments that are income qualified. The total number of units is closer to 400 housing units. Chirpich explained the various types of housing on the diagram. There will be a senior housing unit and a daycare facility that will have a symbiotic relationship. This is a model that is being developed in other communities. There isn't a guarantee that it will be developed this way. Chirpich personally likes this concept. He indicated the continuum of housing, multiple income levels, multiple types, multiple sizes are some of the pillars of the concept plan. For this Commission the question is, how do we integrate the park and make it seamlessly flow into this new development. This isn't shown in the current plan, but staff are asking the developer to work on that concept. The goal is to draw people through the whole park from 53rd Avenue and south so that the space is activated for everyone, not just the new residents. Hansen reiterated that this example is by no means the final site plan. One of the requirements is that the developer installs a play area for children based on the size of the building.

Hansen reported that the Mississippi Watershed Management Organization has started an evaluation of Sullivan Lake and will be working on scenarios for improving water quality. This housing development will be doing extensive storm water quality improvements.

For Sullivan Lake Park, staff received bids today for the concrete slab on the fitness court. Very good bids were received, and they will be on the City Council agenda Monday night for award. City staff will remove the play equipment, and the contractors are responsible for site grading, and pouring the court. Through the National Fitness Campaign, they have contractors that will install the equipment on the concrete pad. The public art piece will be installed at a later date. The artist is nearing completion of the art piece. Staff are looking at the grand opening of the fitness court in September.

Hansen reported that a DNR grant was applied for, and the result of the application should be given in June. If the full or partial grant is approved, one requirement is that everything needs to be approved before work can begin. Therefore, when staff are removing the play equipment, it would be planned on the north side of the park for the expanded play area to be installed soon afterwards. What was applied for through the DNR grant was trail realignment, site grading, and the play area on the north side of the park. Due to the cost and grant limitations, it did not include the revised court areas at this time. The unusable tennis courts will be removed in spring or early summer. These will be transitioned from tennis courts to pickleball courts. The small building with restrooms and lift station will be moved to the south side of the park over the course of the fall. The new play area will be built in spring or summer of 2026.

Hansen would like to have the fitness court grand opening coincide with a Park & Recreation Commission Meeting to make sure as many members can attend. Chirpich asked if the surrounding residents need to be included in the design process for the playground. Hansen replied yes, typically for a playground the neighborhood is included in the process to gain feedback on what they would like or not like to see for equipment. The City has been dealing with a vendor for other play equipment. Since 2008 all of the play equipment has been from Game Time. There is value in using the same vendor in terms of repair and getting replacement equipment. Since the equipment is not all the same or gets put together in the same manner it is beneficial to have similar equipment at many parks. Since staff can do the installation themselves it saves money and is helpful to know how previous pieces have been assembled. There are other manufacturers, and the companies tend to be regional and the type of equipment we have in Minnesota will be different than what you would see in the southern states. Some of the older sets are from other manufacturers and cost more than Game Time. This company also offers grants or discounts towards new equipment. Staff will apply for that discount this fall. Herzallah verified that the timeline for the play equipment is next summer. Hansen replied yes if the grant is awarded, all of the paperwork needs to be completed, and you are not authorized to spend any money or make any improvements until the grant is executed.

Permanent Soccer Field: Development process.

Hansen reported this was a discussion item brought forward by the City Council at the previous work session. The Commission had discussed this in the past as well. This will run through process, and through the Park & Recreation

Commission. Staff have reached out to the park planner at WSB and they will get back with a proposal. Hansen indicated there are limited parks where a full size field could be placed. Public engagement needs to be completed and that is one of the things that the consultant will conduct. With the current staffing situation there are not enough people to be able to complete that. The consultant will set up public meetings with the neighborhoods around the parks where a soccer field would fit and be considered for installation. After feedback from the community staff will decide the size of the fields and needs of each park, develop concepts, get a final site selection, discuss with the Commission, receive a cost estimate, budget, and once a master plan is recommended from the Commission it will be brought to the City Council for final approval. The earliest this could get going is for 2026 construction. A proposal should be received in a week or two with the hope to present that at the Commission meeting in May. Herzallah asked if this is for one field. Hansen replied that it is to be determined. There is really only size for one full size field but there could be space for smaller fields. It goes back to the question of who we are trying to serve in our community, what ages, and also running all programs with the recreation programming. This is a smaller process than a full park system plan but will be a good process with the community engagement perspective. Background work will be conducted in June with more Commission involvement after that initial process.

Reports

A. Recreation Director

Windschitl reported that this is a busy time of year in the recreation department. Staff are currently working on the summer newsletter going to press in two weeks. Baseball and softball youth programs are practicing. Men's softball starts tomorrow night and there are six teams. Positions are open for seasonal summer staff and part time Murzyn Hall staff. All jobs are posted on the City website. Saefke reported the Recreation Coordinator has a lot of volunteers who were previously involved in our programs and have aged out of participating but want to be involved but are not old enough to work for city yet. Windschitl indicated it is nice to have instructors that have come through our programs and come back to work for the City. Saefke indicated that the Beautification Committee is placing their flower order next week and the plants will come at the end of May. Windschitl stated Saefke has been in charge of that for years and Buesgens is one of the volunteers. The city orders the plants and volunteers plant, weed, water, and maintain them at specific parks throughout the year.

B. Public Works Director

Hansen reported the grass is growing and the department is hiring. This is typically a stressful time year because the seasonal staff have not started but yet everything is growing and the parks need to be maintained. For Public Works the employees need to be 18 years old to drive a pickup truck. There are some returning staff from year to year. They are hoping to fill twelve seasonal positions. Hansen reported that the Parks Foreperson Tim Lund is retiring after almost 37 years with the city. His last day is May 9th. That position is in the process of being filled and there are one or two additional fulltime parks positions open. Saefke reported that some of the seasonal parks staff grew up attending recreation programs as well.

C. Commission Members

Herzallah shared a video from his daughter with a request for more play equipment at Huset Park West. She would like to see two hanging bars and a super long slide. His family uses Huset Park a lot and so many kids use the bar, and it is one of the most popular items. He shared that is fourth child was born the night before the last meeting and that is why he was not in attendance. Herzallah then shared treats with the Commission.

Motion by Herzallah, second by Perez Umphress, to adjourn the meeting. Upon vote: All ayes. **Motion Carried.**

Macko adjourned the meeting at 6:54 pm.
Deanna Saefke, Recreation Secretary